

No 215.

5 Cents.

FAME AND FORTUNE

STORIES
OF
BOYS

WEEKLY

WHO MAKE
MONEY.

BOB BRANDON, CONTRACTOR; OR, THE TREASURE THAT LED TO FAME.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



A rush of chattering boys and girls toward the fallen tree attracted Bob's attention from the astonishing discovery he and Will had just made. He turned and beckoned them forward. "Come and see the sight of your lives," he cried.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1909, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 215.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 12, 1909.

PRICE 5 CENTS.

BOB BRANDON, CONTRACTOR

OR,

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By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

BOB BRANDON AND HIS FRIEND WILL.

"It's a fine thing to be rich, Will," said Bob Brandon, reflectively, as he sat on a stool peeling a pan full of potatoes.

"Bet your life it is," replied Will Godfrey, who sat on another stool opposite him shelling a number of quarts of peas.

"You can't do anything in this world without money," said Bob.

"Not a blamed thing," agreed Will.

"That's why we're nothing but a pair of slaves—you and me."

"We aren't much better. We have to hustle from daylight till dark."

"For a measley three fifty per week."

"And our board and lodging."

"Fine board and lodging. An old shake-down in the garret and what's left after the boarders have eaten up everything in sight. It's a wonder we've got any flesh on our bones."

"Oh, we're pretty healthy yet. The doctors say that people eat too much," grinned Will.

"No danger of us eating too much. You like peas for dinner, don't you?"

"I could eat a quart of 'em," replied Will, licking his chops and looking longingly at the mess he was shelling.

"Do you expect to get any to-day?"

"I hope so."

"It'll be a hope deferred, I'm thinking. When the boarders have got a crack at those peas the dish will look like a tree struck by lightning."

"There's more than four quarts here. There ought to be some left."

"Mrs. Atkins and her husband will see that none are wasted. They like peas themselves."

"Then where do we come in?" asked Will, with a blank look.

"I'm surprised to hear you ask such a question after our three weeks' experience here as boys of all work at the Woodbine Cottage."

"We were chumps to take the job."

"Oh, I don't know. We were a pair of wanderers, down on our luck, with nary a roof to cover us, nor a square meal in sight. Any port in a storm, you know."

"I s'pose we can leave any time we want to? We've got ten dollars and a half coming to us so far, besides this week."

"Yes, it's coming to us, and it will continue to be coming to us if we dust out in the middle of the season. We were hired with the understanding that we were to stay as long as the boarders did. If we left before then we were not to get any money."

"Oh, lor'! It was you who made that agreement."

"And you agreed to it."

"We were fools."

"Oh, I don't know. We might have been worse off if we hadn't stopped."

"Not much. We could have gone to work on some farm."

"Where we'd have had to hustle all day long in the hot

sun at less than we are getting here. We have a little time to ourselves in the afternoon. Yesterday I drove some of the boarders over to the lake and I made a dollar."

"What! A whole dollar?" exclaimed Will, enviously. "What did they give you the money for?"

"When we got to the lake they wanted to go to Cedar Island. I told them it would cost a dollar to hire a boat. They consulted and then ante-ed up the price."

"How did you make the dollar, then?"

"I went around to Jerry Long's cottage and borrowed his boat from Lucy."

"Gee! you were smart."

"That's business. I'm out for all I can make. I rowed them over—it was worth a dollar to do that—pointed out the site where the new summer hotel is to be next year, and fetched them back. Then I returned the boat and drove them back here in time for supper."

"You had a snap. I had to work like a trooper most of the afternoon, doing chores, and helping Kittie and the missus get supper," said Will.

"The boarders want me to take them to the village this afternoon. They have taken a fancy to me. I guess I'll be on the job as Mr. Atkins's leg is out of business."

"It ought to be my turn to take 'em," grumbled Will.

"It ain't fair for you to have all the snaps that's going."

"You'd better ask Mrs. Atkins to let you take them, then."

"I see myself doing it. The old griffin would sit on my neck."

"She might, for she's a tartar."

At that moment the lady in question suddenly appeared at the kitchen door near which Bob and Will were seated.

"Ain't you got them peas shelled yet?" she asked, glowering at Will.

"'Most done, ma'am," replied the boy, getting on a big hustle.

"How about them 'taters, Bob Brandon?" she asked in a milder tone, for she was more partial to Bob than to Will, though she didn't waste any kindness on him.

"They're coming, ma'am," answered Bob.

Mrs. Atkins disappeared, and presently the boys heard her jawing the hired girl.

"Kittie has a hard time of it," said Bob.

"I should say so. She's jawed at from morning till night. That's what we friendless orphans are up against. People wipe their feet on us because we haven't any friends. You never said whether you were an orphan, too, Bob."

"No, I'm not. My mother is dead but my father is alive," returned Bob, a cloud coming over his good-looking face.

"Where is your father?" asked Will, curiously.

"He's in S——," replied Bob, in a gloomy tone.

"Didn't you and he pull well together?"

"Oh, yes. We always got along first rate."

"Then how is it he didn't get you something decent to do and keep you from going off on a tramp?"

"Because it was out of his power to do anything for me."

"What does he do for a living himself?"

"He works for the State," said Bob, after a momentary hesitation.

"Got a political job, eh? Then I don't see why he couldn't get you something to do."

Bob made no reply.

There was a look of dejection in his face that showed the unpleasant nature of his thoughts.

That these thoughts were connected with his father there could be little doubt as the cloud had not come over his face until Will had begun questioning him about his only parent.

What the trouble was could only be surmised as Bob wasn't saying anything about it.

In a few minutes both the peas and the potatoes were ready for the kitchen and the boys carried them inside after dumping the skins and the pods in the swill barrel for the pigs to feed on later.

The boys were set at other work, Bob being dispatched to the barn to help Mr. Atkins, whose game leg bothered him a good deal.

Bob and the small farmer got on very well together.

Mr. Atkins was one of those men who are ruled by their wives.

His disposition was meek and non-assertive.

He had nothing to say in the management of the place, except in carrying out his wife's orders, and giving sundry directions himself, the same as a superintendent might for Mrs. Atkins was the boss of the coop.

She owned the property, and, in her opinion, she owned her husband, too, and treated him much the same as she might any other live chattel.

They had been married a good many years, and he had been sat upon so hard, that he had long since realized that he was a mere cipher in the internal economy of the establishment.

Bob naturally saw how the wind blew, and, as he didn't fancy the lady of the house much, he sympathized with Mr. Atkins.

He was always ready to do anything he could to help him, and Mr. Atkins appreciated it, and was grateful to him.

There were only ten acres of ground attached to the house, so the amount of farming done on the property didn't amount to a whole lot.

Mrs. Atkins made her money off summer boarders.

She advertised accommodations for thirty, but twenty filled the house.

Still, she had been known to stow twenty-eight away at a pinch.

The season was only just beginning now, and she had but eight, though four more were expected on the following Saturday.

Bob and Mr. Atkins were busily engaged doing some repairs to the light wagon when the dinner bell rang.

"I'll have to quit now, Mr. Atkins," said the boy, as it was his duty to wait on the table.

Mrs. Atkins had selected him for this service as he was a good-looking and polite boy.

In her opinion, Bob added tone to her house, and she was pleased to see that the boy did his part in a highly satisfactory manner.

Mr. Atkins nodded and Bob went directly to the little room in the garret where he and Will slept and put on his best suit.

After washing his face and brushing his hair he presented a very neat and cheerful appearance, and when he appeared in the dining-room with a plate of bean soup in each hand the boarders all nodded pleasantly to him.

CHAPTER II.

BOB IS TREATED TO A SURPRISE.

"Say, Will, if I had a hundred dollars I know what I'd do," said Bob to his companion a few days later.

"What would you do?" asked Will, curiously.

"I'd take the contract for clearing away the trees on Cedar Island for the new summer hotel."

"How could you when Jerry Long has it?"

"Jerry will never put the job through when the time comes for him to tackle it?"

"Why won't he?"

"Because he likes his booze too well. He couldn't get a hustle on to save his life. He'd rather loaf around the tavern than do an honest day's work."

"How did he come to get the contract, then?"

"Because he's an A1 woodchopper, and he happened to be sober and in the humor for work at the time bids were asked for. He put in the lowest and caught on."

"Suppose you could get the contract, how would you carry it out? You're not a woodchopper, and besides one man couldn't do the work."

"It wouldn't be necessary for me to do any chopping. I'd boss the work, and see that it was done right, and as quick as possible."

"Would a hundred dollars carry it through?"

"No; but it would get it started in good shape, and the payments that are to be made on account as the job progresses would see it through."

"Well, you're not likely to get it so what's the use talking about it?"

"Don't be too sure of that. We'll have forty dollars apiece coming to us when we get through here. If you lend me your forty that would make eighty, and I might see my way to squeeze through with that."

"You might make a mess of the contract if you did get it from Jerry and lose all the money. Then we would be in the soup again."

"Don't you worry about me losing the money."

"How much would you expect to make?"

"A couple of hundred dollars or so. I'd be willing to give you twenty dollars for the loan of your forty."

"How long do you think the job would take?"

"Six weeks or two months. I'd also pay you a dollar a day as a general helper, so by the time the work was finished and paid for you ought to be worth \$100."

"A hundred dollars! I'm with you. I never owned a quarter of that in all my life," said Will, with some eagerness.

The foregoing conversation took place on Sunday afternoon while the two boys were sitting at the back of the barn sunning themselves and taking things easy.

Bob, who had made the acquaintance of Jerry Long and his daughter Lucy during the second week he had been at Woodbine Cottage, had learned about the contract her father had made with the syndicate that was going to put up the new hotel on Cedar Island in Clear Lake.

Lucy, to whom Bob had taken quite a liking, had told him that she was afraid her father wouldn't be able to put the contract through owing to his increasing thirst for liquor and dislike for work.

After talking the matter over with the girl Bob had suggested that if he could raise enough money to get the work under way he would take the contract off her father's hands and give her a percentage of the profits.

She gladly welcomed his suggestion for her father was under a \$100 bond to carry through the contract, and if he failed to do it he would not only lose the money there was in the job, but his friend, who had signed the bond, would have to pay over the \$100, and that was pretty sure to cause hard feelings between them.

As there would be between \$80 and \$90 coming to Bob and Will around the first of September, the former felt that if he could borrow Will's share he would be able to start the ball rolling in case Jerry Long was unable to take hold himself.

So he brought the subject up that afternoon as a feeler to see if Will would be willing to loan him his money.

In case Will showed a reluctance in falling in with his views he wanted to have time enough to look around and see if he could raise the amount he wanted in some other quarter.

The \$20 bonus and promise of a dollar a day for his services captured his friend, as we have seen, so Bob felt satisfied that he would be able to tackle the contract in the event that Jerry failed to come to time.

At that moment a man, attired in an old and shabby suit of clothes, climbed over the fence near at hand that separated the yard from the corn field.

He looked like a wreck, and his movements were slow and undecided.

He stood for a few minutes looking around him, as if uncertain what to do next.

"Hello, who is this chap?" said Will. "I guess he must be a tramp who thinks he can stand this place up for a meal. If he gets anything out of the missus he'll be doing well. She'll probably call on us to bundle him out into the road."

"He looks like a man who is all in," replied Bob. "It would be a shame to turn him away."

The man saw the two boys and advanced toward them.

As he drew near Bob started on his feet with a flushed face and rapidly beating heart.

The stranger's smoothly-shaven features were familiar to his gaze.

"Great Scott! father," he exclaimed. "Is that you?"

The man stopped and stared at him in a bewildered manner.

"Bob!" he cried in a hoarse voice. "You here, my son?"

The hands met in a close grip, and bending forward the forlorn looking intruder kissed Bob.

Will viewed the performance with the greatest amazement.

He could not possibly fathom the meaning of it.

Indeed it was so astonishing that it took his breath away.

"Father, what does this mean?" cried Bob, in anxious suspense.

"It means, my son, that I and several others have escaped from the prison where I was sent."

"Escaped!"

"Escaped," repeated his father. "I have been traveling all night ever since I gave my companions the slip in the darkness, and skulking across the fields and through the woods since sunrise in momentary fear of being recaptured and taken back to finish the long term that to an innocent man is something worse than death. I did not expect to find you here, my boy, but I thank heaven for this meeting, for I thought it might be years before I could have the joy of seeing you once more—of clasping your hands in mine."

"Oh, father, to think that we should meet thus," said Bob, with great emotion. "You look worn out and exhausted. You must be hungry as well as footsore."

"Yes, I am hungry, my son. I have tasted nothing since I partook of the meager prison supper last night," replied the man, wearily.

"You must not be seen, father," said Bob, anxiously. "Come into the barn, where you will be safe for a time at least. I will get you food and drink, and then we will consider what is best to be done. Officers of the law are doubtless searching the country around about for you and the others who escaped with you. Some means must be taken to hide you until the hue and cry is over. If not found by the authorities you may be able to make your way to Canada and begin life again under an assumed name."

Bob pushed open the barn door and led his father inside.

Then he thought of Will, who was staring at them with all his eyes.

"Will, come here," he said.

Pulling his friend inside and closing the door he said.

"This is my father."

"Your father!" ejaculated Will.

"Yes. Stay with him until I return."

Leaving them together Bob hurried across the yard to the house where he found Kittie Carson, the maid of all work, in the kitchen reading a paper.

He and Kitty were the best of friends, and there was hardly anything the girl wouldn't do for him, for he had taken her part several times when abused by Mrs. Atkins.

"Kittie," cried Bob, "I want you to do me a great favor."

"I'll do it," she said, dropping her paper.

"Get me a jug of milk, some meat and bread, and a piece of pie. I want the food for a famished man. And, Kittie, don't say a word about it to any one."

"But Mrs. Atkins may notice that——"

"Never mind Mrs. Atkins. I'll take all the blame and see that you don't suffer for obliging me. Get me the food, quick! It is a case of great urgency."

Kittie saw that Bob was feverishly eager to get what he wanted, so she hastened to do as he asked.

She quickly buttered several slices of bread, put meat between them, and handed them to Bob.

Then she got a jug and filled it with milk.

Inside of ten minutes the boy was back at the barn with the provender.

"Here you are, father. Here's a good meal for you. Eat and say nothing more till you are through."

"Thank you, my dear boy. It will put new life in me, and give me courage to consider what I shall do next."

Thus speaking he fell to eating like the famished man he was.

CHAPTER III.

HARBORING A FUGITIVE.

While his father was eating Bob drew Will aside, for he saw that he would be obliged to make some explanation of this remarkable state of affairs.

"I suppose you are astonished at what you have seen, Will," he said.

"Somewhat," replied his friend. "Your father seems to be in hard luck."

"He is. It's the hardest kind of luck. Now, Will, I'm going to trust you with the truth. My father has just escaped from the State prison."

"From the State prison!" gasped his friend.

"Yes. He was sentenced to six years for a crime he never committed."

"How did that happen?"

"I can't tell you now. I'll explain some other time. But you can take my word for it that he is an innocent man."

"How long has he been in prison?"

"Only a few months."

"When did he escape?"

"Last night, with several other men who were serving their time there. He hasn't had a chance to tell me the particulars yet."

"Does he expect to get clean off?"

"He hopes to, but it is very doubtful, for there is no doubt that word has been sent to the police of all the surrounding towns and villages to be on the lookout for the fugitives."

"You are going to hide him in the barn here?"

"Such is my intention, until after dark."

"And then he will take his chances along the road?"

"No; I intend to take him to the lake and across to Cedar Island. That's a good place for him to remain for a week or two until the hunt cools down."

"How will he live there?"

"I'll see that he gets food."

"I don't know how you're going to get it. Mrs. Atkins is so close with everything that she's bound to miss even a slice of bread. How did you get the stuff your father is eating?"

"Kittie gave it to me at my urgent request."

"The old dragon will miss it when she gets home and starts to get supper for the boarders, then there'll be the dickens to pay. She's liable to beat Kittie."

"Not if I'm around she won't and I expect to be. I shall take the blame myself."

"She'll demand an explanation."

"I'll give her one."

"Will you tell her that you took it for your father?"

"Not much. She mustn't learn that my father is on the premises."

"Mr. Atkins might come to the barn and see him."

"I shall hide him in the loft under the hay, where he can take a sleep till I'm ready to take him away. He hasn't slept a wink all night."

"Suppose one of the village constables should come here and insist on searching the barn?"

"I don't think it is likely he'll want to do any searching if he should come. We've been here all day and if we're asked we will tell him that we did not see any one answering to the description of the person he is after."

"One of the boarders may have seen your father coming across the fields. In fact, may have seen you take him into the barn."

"That's a risk I'll have to run. The chances are that none of the boarders has seen anything that has happened at the back of the house. I believe they're all sitting on the front veranda, or walking up or down the road."

"It's a good thing that Mrs. Atkins and her husband are away calling. Nothing seems to escape her eye when she's around."

"Yes, it is fortunate. When they return you and I will put the horse and buggy in the barn so there will be no need of Mr. Atkins coming here."

By that time Bob's father had finished eating, having swallowed every morsel brought by his son.

"Go outside, Will, and keep watch. Let us know if you see anybody approaching that strikes you as an officer, and give us the tip the moment Mr. and Mrs. Atkins turn up."

"All right," replied Will, and Bob let him out of the barn and then secured the door on the inside.

"Now, father, you'd better take a sleep, for you are certainly fagged out. I'll hide you under the hay up in the loft, and Will and I will keep watch."

"Very well, my son. But tell me how comes it you are here? Are you working at this place?"

"Yes. I lost the job I had in S——, and I had no luck in getting another that amounted to anything. So I started to walk to Boston, thinking I would be sure to get something to do in that city."

"Walk! Had you no money to pay your way?"

"Not a cent. I sold everything that belonged to us both to pay for the appeal your lawyer made, but without success. As it is I still owe him a balance of thirty dollars, which I promised to send him as soon as I could afford to do so."

"You should not have made the appeal, but kept the money for yourself, since I had no chance against the combination of adverse evidence that was brought against me. It was money wasted."

"Father, I could not let the slightest chance go by to save you, believing as I do, that you are innocent of the crime charged against you."

"My dear boy, you are the only friend that stuck by me in my hour of adversity. May heaven bless you for it."

"It was my duty, father. I should have despised myself had I let you go to prison without making every effort in my power to prevent it."

"So you had to walk to Boston?"

"No, I only got as far as this place. On the road I met Will Godfrey, who is an orphan, and as poor and friendless as myself. We hitched together, for we were both bound for the same destination. We stopped here one morning about a month ago to beg a meal, and were offered a job to help around the place during the boarding season, for Mrs. Atkins, who runs this one-horse farm, takes in summer boarders, and she was looking for help. We get three and a half a week and our keep, the wages

to be paid about the first week in September. We took the offer, which promised to land us both in Boston in the early fall with money in our pockets."

"You did right, my son."

"Father, do you not suspect the man who is the cause of your misfortune?"

"Alas, I have not the least foundation for suspicions against any one. All I know is that I never took the money from Mr. Tarleton's safe that I have been convicted of stealing."

"I know you didn't, but I am sure I know the man who did."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"The very last person who should be guilty of any action against you."

"And who is that?"

"The man in the office you detected pilfering from the petty cash drawer, and whom, on making restitution, and promising to never be guilty of such an act again, you shielded from the consequences that would have happened to him had you reported the matter to Mr. Tarleton."

"What, Philip Travers!" cried his father, in some surprise.

"Yes, that's the man."

"Why do you suspect him?"

"Because of the evidence he gave at the trial, for one thing. He did everything he could to make matters black as possible against you while he pretended to be deeply grieved that circumstances compelled him to testify."

"I fear you do him an injustice. How could he have robbed the safe? The combination was known only to me and Mr. Tarleton. That was one of the principal points against me—that, and the urgent need of money to take your mother South."

"Nevertheless, father, I believe he is the thief. He must have discovered the way to open the safe somehow."

"I fail to see how he could. I never told any one the combination."

"Maybe you had a written copy of it in your desk."

"I did have such a copy, but I kept it stowed away at the bottom of a certain drawer I never left unlocked when away from the office."

"He may have had a key made to fit the lock of that drawer."

"Why should he think that the combination of the safe was in writing, and that I kept it in that drawer?"

"He may have been looking for something else and found the combination accidentally."

"It is possible, but not probable."

"Who else, then, could have got into the safe and stolen the money? Who else but Mr. Tarleton knew that on the day you left the office to take mother South there was \$2,000 in bills in the safe?"

"No one that I know of."

"Some day perhaps the truth will come to light, and if it ever does the guilty man will be found to be Philip Travers," said Bob, in a tone of conviction.

"Perhaps so, but I do not accuse him of any connection with my trouble."

"Very well, father, we will not argue the subject further. It is a painful one to both of us. Come with me and I

will show you where you may take a few hours' sleep in comparative security."

Bob led his father up into the loft and stowed him away in a snug corner where the hay was stored, covering him lightly with it so that his presence could not be detected except the hay was disturbed.

Then he left him and rejoined Will, who was perched on the fence close by keeping a bright lookout.

CHAPTER IV.

BOB AND THE PRUNES.

"You haven't seen any one that looked as if he was in search of my father, have you, Will?" asked Bob.

"Two or three automobiles passed by—one with four men in it, but none of them pulled up here," replied Will. "Several men passed on foot, but none of them stopped either."

"Good. I am in hopes of getting my father to the island some time before midnight. When all are in bed, and the house is still, I'll go to the barn and take him away."

"You'll have to borrow Jerry Long's boat. Won't it look strange for you to wake him up to get it?"

"I shall take it without his knowledge."

"But he keeps the oars in the house, doesn't he?"

"Yes, but I'll make out somehow without them. I'll carry a piece of wood to use as a paddle."

"If you want me to go along to help you I will."

"Thanks, Will, but I don't think it will be necessary."

"Where does your father think of escaping to—Canada?"

"I didn't ask him his plans, but that seems to be the nearest refuge for him."

"It's a long way to tramp, for I don't suppose he dare take the chances of riding."

"He hasn't any money to pay for transportation in any case. I shall give him the three dollars I have, which is the best I can do for him."

"I've got a half dollar. You can have that, too," said Will.

"You're a good fellow. I'll take it and pay you back when I get it."

At that moment the buggy containing Mrs. Atkins and her husband hove in sight around a turn in the road.

"Here comes the old dragon," said Will. "I'll run out in front and lead the rig to the barn, while you tip Kittie off to the arrival of the missus."

Most of the boarders were on the front veranda when the buggy drove up.

Mr. Atkins turned the horse and buggy over to Will and he led it around to the barn where he found Bob waiting.

They put the horse in its stall, fed and watered it, and pushed the buggy into its place in the barn.

Then they locked the place up again and went into the kitchen to help with the preparations for supper.

Mrs. Atkins noticed right away that some of the cold meat was missing, and she called Kittie to account for it.

Bob said he took the food to feed a poor famished man.

"You did," she cried, angrily. "Do you suppose that I keep open house for every tramp who comes along?"

"No, ma'am; but this was a deserving case," protested Bob.

"How do you know that? A tramp is a tramp, and they get nothin' from me, let me tell you. They're a lot of thieves and vagabonds, and ought to be took up on sight. Why," she cried, examining the dish, "you have given him enough for two men. Now I shall be short of meat for supper."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I'm willing to have you take the worth of it out of my wages," said Bob. "The man was almost starving, and I couldn't send him away in that condition."

"What sort of a lookin' man was he?" she asked suddenly. "Did he have short hair like them jail birds in the penitentiary? We heard in the village that four men escaped from the prison in S——. Maybe he was one of the rascals."

"He didn't look like a convict, ma'am; he had too honest a face for that."

"Honest, indeed!" sniffed the lady. "I've heard that many of the worst criminals have the most honest-lookin' faces in the world. I know of one man who was hanged for murderin' his wife and six children and they said he looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. Honest face, humph!"

Instead of giving Bob a further calling down she let it go at that, and the boy congratulated himself on getting off easy.

The secret of the matter was Mrs. Atkins regarded Bob as a valuable asset in her boarding-house, and she was smart enough to see that he was a boy she couldn't go too far with.

Rather than run the chance of losing his services she was willing to make sundry concessions in his favor.

Had Kittie or Will been the guilty party in this case she would have made Rome howl, and they wouldn't have heard the last of it for a week.

Mrs. Atkins made up the shortage in the meat by cutting down the quantity sent in to each guest, and adding to the stewed fruit that was a regular feature of Sunday's tea, thereby pulling out to her own satisfaction if not to the satisfaction of the boarders.

Of course, there was no meat for Bob, Will and Kittie on this occasion, though they were blessed with healthy appetites.

When they pulled up at the kitchen table for their tea they found that their allotment was a cup of tea, two slices of bread, a small piece of stale cheese, and a lonesome looking prune with a quantity of juice for each of them.

They didn't expect a whole lot on Sunday evening, but this layout was the skimpiest they had yet been treated to.

"Suffering snaps! One prune. Wouldn't that jar you?" growled Will.

Kittie tittered.

She had been Mrs. Atkins's steady help for two years, and the lonesome prune was no novelty to her.

"How many prunes do you want, Will?" chuckled Bob.

"I could eat a dozen without winking," he answered.

"Where are the prunes kept, Kittie?" asked Bob.

"In a jar in the pantry."

"Are there any more?"

"Yes."

"Did Mrs. Atkins count what are left before she went out front?"

"No."

"Do you want some more prunes, Kittie?"

"Oh, I wouldn't dare ask for another."

"Kittie, you're wasting away to a shadow. Your clothes don't fit you any more," grinned Bob, as he rose.

As the girl was quite a plump little thing despite her short diet, she and Will laughed heartily at Bob's remark.

"What are you going to do, Bob? You don't mean to get the prunes, do you?" asked Will, almost staggered at his companion's nerve, right after the bread and meat requisition he had made on the missus's stores for his father.

"You shut up, Will Godfrey. I'm running this tea table to-night," replied Bob.

He went to the pantry, got the jar and ladled out half a dozen extra prunes all around.

Kittie almost had a fit at his audacity.

But Bob wasn't through.

He got the rest of the loaf of bread and divided that up also.

"Now, we've got something to eat," he said in a tone of satisfaction. "Don't forget, folkses, to throw the prune stones out before Mrs. A. makes her appearance."

For fear that the missus might appear unexpectedly the prunes disappeared in a hurry.

"Gosh! They tasted good, all right," said Will, smacking his lips.

"Want some more?" asked Bob.

"Lord, no; do you want us to be murdered?" replied Will.

"How did they go, Kittie?" said Bob.

"Splendid; but I'm afraid the missus'll miss 'em."

"What do you care? You didn't take them."

"But I ate six of 'em."

"That's all right. Just forget it."

"I can't. I never had seven prunes all in one bunch before."

They agreed that they had had a better supper than the boarders enjoyed.

"I wish you always laid out our supper for us," said Will, "then we'd have enough to eat. Christopher! You had a nerve to appropriate those prunes, and the rest of the loaf of bread. When the old dragon looks into that jar she'll think another tramp has been this way and dined off her sweets," laughed Will.

Kittie washed the dishes and the boys dried them.

Bob then secured another jug of milk, filled his pockets with crackers and appropriated a hunk of cheese.

With these things he and Will adjourned to the barn.

Brandon senior was still sleeping soundly.

Bob didn't awake him, but laid the things down beside a lighted lantern.

Then he and Will locked the barn door again, and took their seats near the kitchen door, where they were joined by Kittie.

When nine o'clock struck Kittie went to her little room in the attic, and the boys went to theirs.

Bob remained only long enough to get his three dollars and the fifty cent piece from Will, when he crept downstairs, let himself out by the kitchen door, which he locked and put the key in his pocket.

Then he went over to the barn and let himself in.

CHAPTER V.

THE THREE CONVICTS.

Three hours later two forms issued cautiously from the barn.

They were Bob and his father.

It was a calm, still and warm July night.

The moon was not yet up, which both regarded with satisfaction.

As well as they could tell everybody was asleep in Woodbine Cottage.

When they reached the road they looked up and down it, but it was silent and deserted.

"Come on, father, the coast is clear," said Bob, and down the road they started in the direction of Clear Lake, three miles away.

Mr. Brandon was much refreshed by the sleep he had had, and easily kept pace with his stalwart son.

In due time they reached the shore of the lake and Bob went to the spot where Jerry Long kept his boat moored to the landing behind his cottage.

The oars were not in her, but in expectation of that fact Bob had brought with him a piece of board to use as a paddle.

He unshipped the painter, got in and worked the boat to the place where his father stood waiting for him.

Taking him aboard the boy paddled out on the lake and made for Cedar Island.

It was slow and laborious work to send the boat along with only the board as a means of propelling it, but they reached the island at last and landed.

Bob guided his father to a spot that he regarded as a safe hiding place—a small cave concealed by a growth of brush close to an enormous tree that towered high above its fellows.

"No one will ever think of looking for you here, father," he said. "Better keep close under cover during the day, for there is no telling who comes here. You will find a stream of drinking water on the other side of that big tree. Some time to-morrow night, or before if I can manage it, I'll bring you a supply of food. Try and make the crackers do until then."

"I'll get along, my son, don't you worry," replied Mr. Brandon, in a hopeful tone.

"All right. I'll leave you now and get back to the farm house. As I have to be up at five I won't get much sleep to-night."

Bob recrossed the lake and tied the boat to her moorings just as he had found her.

Then he started to walk back to Woodbine Cottage.

After covering half the distance he sat down on a dead log, with his back against a tree, to rest.

His thoughts reverted to his father, a hunted fugitive, and he wondered if it would be possible for him to escape to Canada, where, under an assumed name, he might hide his identity and make a living for himself.

As Bob thought the matter over his eyes grew heavy, his head drooped low, and he fell asleep, lulled by the monotonous croak of the frogs in a nearby bit of marsh.

How long he slept he never knew, but he was aroused at length by voices close at hand.

"It's time we started," said a rough voice. "It's about three, and it'll be daylight in an hour and a half. The crib ought to be easy to crack by gents of our experience, even if we hain't got so much as a jimmy about us."

"Whatever you say goes, Tattum," spoke up another voice. "We're dead busted, and hungry enough to chew a ten-penny nail. If we're goin' to be took I'd jest as soon be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"Where in thunder d'ye s'pose that Brandon chap went to?" said a third voice. "We lost him soon after we got clear of the prison walls. If he shook us he's a mean livered skunk, for he wouldn't have got out if it hadn't been for us."

"I guess he got lost in the shuffle," replied the first speaker with a short laugh, "and has likely been caught and taken back. He was one of them gents that goes wrong when they're pinched for the ready. It goes harder with them chaps when they're found out and jugged, 'cause they ain't used to bein' cooped up."

"I'm glad he's not with us," said the second man. "He'd only be in the way, and I reckon he wouldn't cotton to the lay we're on. There'll be one less to divide the swag, so there'll be more for us."

"Let's get on," said Tattum. "We want to get out of these diggin's afore daylight."

The three men, who were clearly the three convicts who had escaped from the State penitentiary with Bob's father, moved away in the gloom.

"Those rascals are going to rob some house in this neighborhood," thought Bob, who had overheard enough of their conversation to satisfy him as to their identity and the purpose they had in view. "It is my duty to prevent them from carrying out their project if I can, and secure their arrest. They have helped my father to escape, and I wouldn't give them away if they went about their business; but when they contemplate a fresh crime it's up to me to put a stop to it."

So Bob followed the men, keeping them in view as they walked along the road close to the fence, stopping when they stopped, and taking care not to expose himself, or make any more noise than he could help.

In this way they all went along until Bob saw the Woodbine Cottage looming up ahead, and then he began to suspect that the boarding house was the object of the rascals.

It proved so.

They entered the yard and made their way to the kitchen window.

They had nothing but a stout jack-knife with which to force entrance, but to professional housebreakers, such as these fellows appeared to be, that was sufficient to enable them to open the window.

Bob watched them from around the corner of the house, and saw the sash yield to their persistent endeavors.

They threw it up and looked inside.

As there was nothing now to stop them from entering the kitchen they scrambled in one after the other, leaving the window wide open to facilitate their retreat.

After waiting a few minutes Bob made his way over to the barn, entered and secured a stout cudgel that stood in a corner.

With this weapon he started for the house and let him-

self in by the kitchen door, which he locked, and removed the key.

Looking into the kitchen he saw no signs of the convicts so he shut the window and went into the entry.

Here he stood in the dark and listened, his heart beating quickly, for he knew there would soon be a rumpus in the house.

He thought he heard sounds in the dining-room, and he made his way to the door, which stood ajar.

A faint light shone through the crack and he peered in. The three men were in there, rummaging around.

They had lighted a candle to see by.

Had there been a key in the lock Bob would have closed the door and locked them in, but there were no keys in any of the doors on the ground floor except the two in the front door and kitchen.

The rascals were searching rapidly and in a systematic way, but found little that they cared to appropriate.

The table was laid for breakfast.

One of them cleared a space at the end of the table on which he spread one of Mrs. Atkins's clean table cloths.

They intended to use it to make a bundle of their plunder.

Bob knew that Mrs. Atkins and her husband occupied one of the third floor rooms which they sometimes turned over to boarders when they were short of accommodations.

He immediately started upstairs to arouse the lady and her husband, and inform them of the state of affairs.

Reaching their door he knocked softly on it.

Mrs. Atkins was a light sleeper, but the boy had to repeat his knock several times before he got an answer.

"Who's there?" asked the lady, starting up in bed.

"Bob," replied the boy through the keyhole.

"What do you want?"

"Come to the door and I'll tell you."

Mrs. Atkins seemed in no hurry to comply.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Thieves in the house," replied Bob, seeing that she would not come unless he startled her.

His words did the business.

She was out of bed in a twinkling and rushed over to the door which she unlocked and held open slightly.

"Did you say thieves?" she palpitated, evidently much alarmed.

"Yes, ma'am. Three of them. They're the convicts who escaped from the State prison last night."

"How do you know that?" she asked in a tremulous tone.

"I heard them talking about their escape."

"Where are they?"

"They were in the dining-room a few minutes ago. I'm going upstairs to get Will to help me tackle them. You'd better wake up Mr. Atkins, though I'm afraid he can't do much unless he's got a revolver or loaded gun in the room."

"There is a revolver in our bureau, and a shotgun in the closet, but I don't know whether the gun is loaded or not. I'm afraid it isn't."

"The revolver will be better. The thieves do not appear to be armed."

"Wait here till I call Mr. Atkins," she said.

She shut the door, and presently Bob heard her talking to her husband.

It seemed an age to the boy before the door opened and

Mr. Atkins appeared with a small lighted lamp and the revolver.

"Don't bring any light," said Bob, pushing him back.

"How can we see the burglars without a light?" replied the small farmer.

"If you carry a lamp they'll see you a great deal better than you'll see them. If they were armed you'd make a good mark for them. Turn the light down and leave it in the room."

Mrs. Atkins seemed to see the force of Bob's advice if her husband didn't.

"The boy is right," she said, sharply. "Give me that lamp."

She snatched it out of his hand, pushed him out into the landing and shut the door.

Mr. Atkins grabbed Bob by the arm, and the boy could feel him tremble at the prospect of an encounter with the rascals, though the weapon gave him every advantage over them.

"You wait here and shoot if they come up to this floor," said Bob. "I don't think they'll be up yet awhile, though."

"Where are you going? Don't leave me alone," said Mr. Atkins in trembling tones.

"I'm going to the attic to arouse Will."

"I'll go with you."

"No. It's your place to stand at the head of the stairs here. Don't shoot unless you're sure of hitting one of them."

Mr. Atkins, however, held on to Bob's arm.

"Let me go, sir. There is no time to lose," said Bob, trying to shake off his grip.

The farmer, however, had the funks on and wouldn't let Bob go.

"Give me your revolver, then, and go up and arouse Will yourself. Here, take this club and give it to Will."

Mr. Atkins agreed to go to the attic on the errand.

He readily yielded the weapon to Bob and taking the club started up the stairs that led to the attic.

Left alone Bob listened for any sound that would give him an idea where the intruders were now.

Not hearing anything he slipped downstairs with the weapon cocked in his hand and ready for business.

CHAPTER VI.

BOB'S EXPLOIT.

Bob stopped at the head of the first flight of stairs and listened.

He heard smothered sounds coming from the parlor, so it was evident that the rascals were in there.

In a few minutes he saw them come out of that room.

One held the candle in his hands while the others carried a number of things they had picked up.

They disappeared into the dining-room.

In a few minutes they reappeared and started to ascend the stairs cautiously, the man with the candle in advance.

"This is where I've got the bulge on you," muttered Bob.

He raised his revolver and fired at the man in advance.

The stunning report startled the whole house.

The man with the candle fell with a groan and the light dropped on the stair carpet.

The other two convicts stopped in consternation.

The warm reception they had met with was so unexpected, like a flash of lightning from a clear sky, that they stood rooted to their tracks.

The faint light given by the expiring candle showed their shadowy forms to Bob and he fired at the second man.

He, too, fell and the boy could hear him swearing and groaning.

"Help me, Bill, I'm shot in the thigh," he said.

His companion had started to retreat at the second shot, and paid no attention to his wounded associate.

He rushed for the kitchen to make his escape, satisfied that the game was up.

Bob darted downstairs after him, and saw him pushing up the window in the kitchen.

"Throw up your hands or I'll plug you," cried the boy covering the rascal with his revolver.

The fellow saw he had no chance so he yielded to the inevitable.

"March this way," commanded Bob, and the convict obeyed.

Sounds of excitement and confusion reached their ears.

"Walk over to the foot of the stairs," was Bob's next order.

It was so dark in the lower hall that the boy could barely keep track of his prisoner, but he warned the rascal that he had him covered with his weapon and that it wouldn't be well for him to try to make any trouble.

"Bring a light," shouted Bob, in a tone that reached all parts of the house.

The husband of one of the lady boarders appeared at the head of the stairs clad in his pajamas, with a lamp in his hand.

The light showed him the situation.

The first convict lay unconscious half way up the stairs, with a bullet in his chest, which was bleeding freely; the second sat several steps below him holding one hand over his wounded thigh and muttering imprecations over his hard luck, while the third stood at the foot of the flight, held up by Bob's pointed revolver.

Will now appeared with the club beside the gentleman in the pajamas.

"Come down, Will," cried Bob. "I want you to go to the barn and get some rope to tie this chap I've got at the point of my gun, and also the other fellow if it is necessary."

Will slid down the banister with his club.

"Hurry up and get the rope," said Bob, when his friend landed beside him.

Changing the weapon to his left hand, but never taking his eye off his prisoner, Bob pulled the key of the kitchen door out of his pocket and handed it to Will.

Will lost no time in fetching a bunch of thin rope, and during the interim two other men boarders made their appearance, half dressed, at the head of the stairs.

On the second landing, or third floor, Mrs. Atkins was trying to make her husband go down to the scene of the disturbance, but he seemed loath to do so.

Naturally a timid man, his wife had taken whatever courage he might have had out of him by her brow-beating tactics, and now he was absolutely useless as a protector.

Finally on seeing the three men at the head of the first flight he plucked up courage enough to join them.

While Will was away on his errand the men above asked Bob for particulars, and he explained the situation in a few words.

By the time he had concluded Will appeared with the rope, and then Bob asked the men to come down and help secure the convicts.

They did so, leaving the lamp with Mr. Atkins.

When Mrs. Atkins surmised that the danger was over she came down in a wrapper.

"Is that man dead?" she asked, pointing at the chap who lay bleeding on the stairs.

"No, madam," replied the gentleman in the pajamas; "but he seems to be badly wounded. Your young man Bob Brandon is a brave lad. He laid the three rascals out alone without any help. He deserves the thanks of all in the house, and he shall have it if I have anything to say."

Mrs. Atkins was surprised at Bob's nerve, and congratulated herself more than ever in having him about the house.

Only for him the cottage and the boarders might have been cleaned out of everything of value.

The unconscious man was lifted from the stairs and carried out to the kitchen where he was propped up on the floor.

The other wounded man was placed in a chair there, while the third fellow was deposited in a corner, bound hand and foot.

"You better get your jacket, Will, and then hitch up the light wagon and drive into the village after the head constable," said Bob.

"I don't know where he lives," replied Will.

"Then get Mr. Atkins to go. Tell him to dress and you'll have the rig ready for him when he gets downstairs."

Will went up to see Mrs. Atkins about it, as she was the boss.

She immediately ordered her husband to get ready and go for the constable.

Will then went to the barn to hitch the horse to the light wagon.

The three male guests and Bob remained in the kitchen with the prisoners.

They managed to revive the unconscious man, and as he looked as if he stood greatly in need of the services of a doctor, Mr. Atkins was told to bring one back with him.

Bob was highly complimented for his courage in tackling the convicts single-handed, and capturing the entire three, and he accepted the praise bestowed upon him with due courtesy.

The guests wanted to know how he discovered that the rascals were in the house.

"You must have been wide awake, and are blessed with pretty sharp ears to hear from the attic what was happening on the first floor," said the man with the pajamas.

Bob was rather disconcerted by the curiosity of the three guests, which he knew would extend to everybody in the house, for he did not want it known that he had been out at so late an hour, inasmuch as it would lead to inquiry as to his motive in being away, and that would be perilous to his father.

In order to get around it Bob said he was awake and was looking out of his window when he saw the three men

approach the house, and regarding their actions as suspicious he had dressed and investigated.

Ordinarily Bob scorned to tell a lie, and would sooner take the consequences of any act of his than try to evade it by a false statement.

But in the present instance his father's safety was vitally concerned, and he felt he was justified in adopting any subterfuge that would save his only parent.

Daylight was breaking when Mr. Atkins drove up to the house with a doctor.

He announced that the constable and a couple of his assistants would follow shortly in their own rig and take charge of the prisoners.

The doctor examined the badly wounded man, and said that while his injury was serious he did not think the man would die.

He fixed him up and then attended to the chap whose thigh had been perforated.

By the time he had finished the constable and two deputies drove up.

The constable had already heard the main points about the capture of the escaped convicts from Mr. Atkins, who gave Bob full credit for the business.

After looking the rascals over he said to the boy:

"Upon my word, young man, I don't see how you managed to do it all by yourself. You certainly displayed great nerve."

"Oh, I got the drop on two of them with the revolver, and then chased the other into the kitchen where I caught him as he was about to escape through the window. You see they had no weapons and the gun in my hands did the business," replied Bob.

"That's all very true, but it isn't every person who would tackle three escaped criminals the way you did. You deserve a medal for your performance."

The constable carried the convicts out to their wagon, loaded them aboard of it, and drove off.

It was now quarter of five and the sun was rising, so there was no use of Bob turning in or Will returning to his bed.

By the time they had freshened themselves up with a wash it was time for them to do their morning chores, and feed the live stock.

Only the guests returned to their rooms, and they were not likely to sleep any more after the exciting events of the morning.

Three of the men had to get an early breakfast anyhow in order to catch a train for Boston.

Mrs. Atkins had enough to do to straighten out the parlor and dining-room, while her husband went out to milk the two cows, and Kittie started preparations for breakfast.

The three men who were going away said they'd like to have Bob drive them to the station in the village, and although this was the business of Mr. Atkins, the lady of the house consented to have Bob take his place.

On reaching the station the men chipped in five dollars each and presented the sum to Bob as an evidence of their appreciation of his services in saving the cottage from being robbed.

This was a welcome as well as unexpected windfall for the boy, and he immediately laid a portion of it out in provisions for his father.

He bought a bag, put the stuff in it, and when he got back to the farm hid the bag in the loft of the barn.

After he had eaten his breakfast he was called out on the veranda and handed ten dollars more as a collection from the lady boarders.

Mrs. Atkins also added a ten dollar bill, as she was afraid it would look bad if she didn't show some public evidence of her gratitude.

Bob now found himself in possession of \$33 and the bag of provisions, and he felt that his morning's work had been quite profitable.

Twenty-five dollars of this money he intended to turn over to his father.

The first chance he got to tell Will the full particulars of how he had got on to the convicts came when they went out into the truck-patch together to gather the vegetables needed for dinner.

"It was mighty lucky for everybody in the house that you were out last night," said Will, after he had heard Bob's story.

"I guess it was; but I don't want anybody to know that I was out. It might cause suspicion and endanger my father's safety," replied Bob.

"That's right," admitted Will. "I understand now why you told that ghost story about piping the convicts off from the window. When I was awakened by the two reports of the revolver downstairs I knew you hadn't been in the room since you left soon after nine. My first idea was that one of the boarders had been awakened by your return at that late hour, had taken you for a thief who had broken into the house and fired at you. I didn't know that there were real burglars in the place till Mr. Atkins came up and told me."

Bob and Will had a couple of hours off that afternoon between three and five and the former took advantage of the fact to visit Cedar Island with Will, and carry the bag of provisions to his father.

There was enough provender to last Mr. Brandon for a week, and Bob handed him the twenty-five dollars at the same time, after telling him about the stirring events that had happened to him after they had parted.

Mr. Brandon was greatly astonished to learn that his son had captured the three men who had escaped from the prison with him.

"I'll have to be extra careful and you'd better not visit me again till next Sunday," he said. "The fact that the three men were captured in this neighborhood will likely lead to a close hunt for me, as it will be surmised that the fourth man must be somewhere in this vicinity, too."

Bob agreed that his father's reasoning was good, and advised him to keep in his hiding place all the week.

It turned out as Mr. Brandon had said.

As soon as the prison authorities learned where the three convicts were taken a posse was sent to scour that neighborhood for Brandon.

Bob was interviewed by the prison officials, and when they learned his name was Brandon, too, they questioned him closer and soon found out that he was the son of the man they were after.

He denied having seen his father, but they took very little stock in that.

They suspected that the escaped prisoner was somewhere near by.

They searched the barn and another building without results and then went off to beat up the neighborhood for miles around.

Next day Bob received a complimentary letter from the authorities of the State prison in relation to the part he had played in the capture of the three convicts, enclosing a check for \$300.

Bob was delighted at getting the money.

He deposited the check at the village bank and opened a special deposit account with it.

On visiting the village the following Saturday afternoon to bring a party of new boarders to the farm house he learned with satisfaction that the fourth escaped prisoner had not been recaptured.

He bought more provisions to take to his father, and on the following afternoon he and Will carried the provender to the island.

When they visited Mr. Brandon's hiding place they found he was not there.

They waited around there as long as they could spare the time, but he did not show up.

"I'll leave the provisions in the cave and try to get over to-morrow," he told his companion.

Several days passed before Bob found the chance to go to the island again.

When he did he found that the provisions he had left on Sunday had not been touched.

He hunted the island all over but could find no sign of his father.

Apparently Mr. Brandon had left the island.

"I wonder how he managed it without a boat," thought Bob. "I am sure he couldn't have gone without bidding me good-bye unless he had some strong reason for making a hurried departure. I hope he may not be taken, and that he will find some safe way of communicating with me."

The days passed into weeks and the end of the summer season came around and still Bob got no word from his father.

He had found out through the village constable, however, that Mr. Brandon had not been found in spite of the diligent search made for him, and this assurance gave him great satisfaction.

He now believed that his father was comparatively safe from capture, and ceased to worry about the matter.

CHAPTER VII.

BOB'S FIRST CONTRACT.

With the departure of the last batch of boarders the summer job of Bob and Will came to an end, and they were not sorry.

They had worked eleven weeks for Mrs. Atkins and there was \$38.50 coming to each of them.

Bob had also received about six dollars in tips from the boarders, since the capture of the convicts, and he had \$8 left after giving his father the \$28.50, so that, with the \$300 he got from the prison superintendent, and his wages, he now had \$362 altogether, while Will had \$40.

"You have quite a boodle," said Will, rather enviously.

"Yes; I am pretty well fixed at present," replied Bob.

"Are you going to tackle that job on the island?" asked Will.

"I am. I've arranged with Jerry to take it off his hands, as he doesn't care to carry it out, and I'm to give Lucy a percentage of what I make out of it."

"Will the hotel company let you take it?"

"Jerry told me he'd fix that all right."

"You won't want to borrow my \$40 now?"

"No, but I'll give you a job at \$1.25 a day."

"All right," said Will. "I'm your man. Where are you going to stay while the job is on?"

"We are going to take a room at Jerry's and Lucy has agreed to board us. It will cost us \$3 a week each."

"When do we go there?"

"To-morrow."

"And when do you expect to start the work at the island?"

"On Monday."

"If there isn't any hitch about your arrangements."

"I don't expect any. I'm a regular contractor now, and intend to put up my own \$100 forfeit that I'll put the work through all right."

Thus speaking Bob pulled some cards out of his pocket which the local printer had struck off for him.

He handed one to Will.

This is what his friend read:

BOB BRANDON,
GENERAL CONTRACTOR,

Jerry Long's Cottage,
Cedar Lake.

Satisfaction Guaranteed.

"Are you going into the business?" asked Will in surprise.

"Surest thing you know, Will."

"What do you mean by General Contractor? Do you intend to bid on any kind of work?"

"Anything that I feel I am able to tackle with success."

"But you haven't had any experience at the business. How will you be able to bid for different kinds of work?"

"I've had some experience. I worked more than a year for a general contractor in S——, in his office and I learned how he bid on many kinds of work. I was with him when my father was arrested for stealing \$2,000 from the safe of the office where he was employed as cashier and head bookkeeper."

"Say, you promised to tell me about that matter. You say he was innocent of the charge. If he was somebody else must have pinched the money. Didn't suspicion point at any one else in the office?"

"No, because my father was the only one beside the boss who had the combination of the safe. That, and the fact that he needed a considerable sum of money to take my mother, who was dying with consumption, South, in an effort to prolong her life and perhaps cure her, brought about my father's conviction."

"But if he didn't take the money he could show that he didn't have it," said Will. "As long as the goods wasn't found on him I don't see how he could have been convicted."

"It was believed that he had hidden the money so that it wouldn't be found on him in case Mr. Tarleton, suspect-

ing him of the theft, sent an officer to arrest him and bring him back to S—— to face the charge."

"Belief isn't proof," replied Will.

"No, but when Mr. Tarleton swore on the stand that my father was the only person in the office beside himself who could open the safe, and my father admitted that fact, and also admitted that he needed quite a sum of money to take mother South, the case looked black against him since he did take my mother as far as Richmond before he was arrested."

"If your father couldn't afford to take your mother South, as you say, how did he manage to start on the trip?"

"He borrowed \$500 from an old friend who was on the eve of taking a long sea voyage for his health, and the greater part of this money was found on him, and considered a part of the stolen \$2,000."

"Well, he could call on his friend to show that he had loaned him the money, couldn't he?"

"No. That gentleman was then out at sea and could not be reached."

"That was unfortunate."

"It certainly was; but still, even if my father had been able to prove that fact, I doubt if it would have cleared him, for the fact that he alone of the office force had access to the safe was the clincher that really convicted him."

"It seems to me that the evidence against him was purely circumstantial."

"That is true; but circumstantial evidence has hanged many a man."

"That's right. I have read of such cases; but they happened in England a great many years ago, when people were hanged for 'most anything from passing counterfeit notes to murder."

"Well, the shock of my father's arrest brought on a hemorrhage that killed my mother, and so the affair was doubly unfortunate for us," said Bob, wiping away a tear.

"Gee! That was tough," replied Will, sympathetically.

"I should say so."

"Well, you have one satisfaction—your father didn't stay long in prison."

"No, but he's a fugitive from justice, and must hide his identity under a false name, with the constant fear always over him that he may be recognized at any moment and be taken back to serve his full term, without rebate for good conduct."

"How long was he sentenced for?"

"Six years."

"And how much would have been taken off had he not escaped?"

"Two years."

"I suppose it's harder for an innocent man to put in four years than for a guilty one to serve six. I know that's the way I'd feel about it."

"That's the way my father felt. His conviction, and my mother's death broke his heart. I doubt if he would have lived out the four years."

"Then it's a good thing he escaped. In the meantime the real criminal may be brought to light—for such things do happen."

"I hope so. I am pretty sure I know who he is."

"You do?"

"Yes. I have no proof against him, however. He's a

man my father was too good to, and, like a snake, the rascal turned on him."

"Wasn't any effort made to show him up?"

"No, he was not suspected even by my father. I have reason to suspect him, though, and maybe the time will come when he'll get what's coming to him."

On the following day the boys moved their belongings over to Jerry Long's cottage by the lake.

That afternoon a representative of the hotel company called to find out why Jerry desired to transfer his contract to another party, and also to find out if that person was responsible.

Jerry said that an attack of rheumatism would prevent him from carrying out the work, and guaranteed that Bob Brandon would do it to the company's satisfaction.

Bob offered to put up a cash bond of \$100 that he would put the work through, and after some discussion the contract was transferred to him.

"I'll begin the work on Monday, and I'll see that it is finished within the time limit," he said.

"All right, young man. I'll be down here toward the end of the week to see how you're making out," replied the company's representative.

Bob and Will visited the island and went over the ground once more, and Bob decided just where he would begin operations.

He then called on the men recommended by Jerry whom he intended to employ and made his arrangements with them, and hired a pair of oxen to drag the trees away as soon as felled, and drag out the stumps after their hold on the earth had been weakened.

During Bob's stay at the Atkins farm he had got acquainted with many of the village boys and girls.

When they learned he had taken the contract to clear a part of Cedar Island for the new hotel small parties of them came over to watch the work after it had got well under way.

Bob was very popular among them and they took great interest in seeing how he bossed the job.

The work proceeded rapidly after it was fairly started, for Bob was a hustler, and didn't believe in letting the grass grow under his feet when he had anything on hand to do.

The company's representative appeared at stated intervals to inspect the progress made, and pay Bob the weekly sum on account agreed upon.

At the end of two weeks Bob had the ground sufficiently cleared to enable the men engaged to dig and lay the foundations of the building to begin their work.

He finished his contract in five weeks, or a week earlier than the contract called for, and received the final payment, which was quite a sum, as it included what had been kept back.

"Well, how did you come out?" asked Will, when Bob had made up his accounts.

"I cleared \$275. Twenty per cent. of that I have to turn over to Lucy according to my agreement. That will leave me a profit of \$220 for five weeks' work."

"That's over \$40 a week. Gee! I wish I was a contractor."

"After paying this week's board I'll be worth \$564."

"And I'll be worth \$63. That shows you're a whole

lot smarter than me, for we both landed in this neighborhood without a cent."

"Well, you must figure \$300 of that as pure luck. If I hadn't captured those convicts I wouldn't have got it."

"I forgot about that. Still, counting the \$28 you gave your father you've made \$250 any way to my sixty odd. What are you going to do now? Start for Boston? We can go by rail now."

"Not yet. I've got the promise of another contract."

"That so? What is it?"

"I'll tell you all about it as soon as the papers are signed."

CHAPTER VIII.

BOB'S NEW CONTRACT.

The new contract that Bob had bid upon, and which he had the promise of, was to put up a five-foot stone wall for a distance of 300 feet along the front of the property of the president of the village bank which faced upon the country road.

The wall was also to be continued at right angles at both ends back from the road for 100 feet, making altogether 500 feet of wall.

Spaces were to be left in two places for gates, the putting in of which was a separate job.

Two other persons had bid on the work, but Bob's bid was much lower than either.

The secret of this was that he had accidentally learned of a place where he could get good stone for the cost of leasing the ground and carrying the material away, while the men who bid against him figured on having to bring the stone from an island in Clear Lake, where there was a lot of it.

Bob found he could get a year's lease for \$50 and the taxes on the property, which didn't amount to much.

There were thirty acres of land and a small tumble-down house.

The owner had been trying to sell the property for several years but couldn't find a buyer at \$40 an acre, what he wanted for it.

Bob got a thirty-day option on the lease for \$10.

If he got the contract he would sign the lease and pay the balance.

If he didn't he intended to let the \$10 go by default.

The success he had made with his contract for clearing the site of the new hotel on Cedar Island was sufficiently appreciated by the president of the village bank to cause him to consider Bob's bid for the stone wall, and when the boy assured him that he could carry out the contract according to the specifications for the sum he asked, he got the job, and the papers were signed at once.

Bob then signed the lease of the land and paid the \$40 balance on it.

As soon as matters were settled he told Will about it and promised him a job at \$1.25 a day.

"What will I have to do?" asked Will.

"I'm going to put you in charge of the two wagons I shall use for drawing the stone from the property I've leased to the site of the wall. It will be your business to see that no time is lost in loading them, and to lend a hand doing it."

"All right," replied Will. "I'll do my part all right."

"We'll start to work on Monday. There is no time limit, but it is understood that the job is to be finished before the first snow fall."

When it became known to the other bidders that Bob Brandon had captured the contract for building the wall they didn't like it a bit.

They belonged to the village, and as the boy was only a newcomer, they regarded him as an interloper, and thought he had no right to take work away from them.

They held a pow-wow together at the tavern that Jerry Long frequented, and after expressing their sentiments in no uncertain way, they put their heads together and decided to do all they could to prevent Bob from carrying out the work.

Jerry happened to be sitting within earshot of them, and heard what they said.

Next day he hunted Bob up and warned him to look out for the two men.

"Thank you, Jerry, for the tip. I'll keep my weather eye lifting never fear. If they try on any tricks with me they'll find I'm a live one," replied Bob.

On the following Monday the young contractor began work on the job.

The first day was devoted entirely to bringing up a supply of stone from the leased farm.

On the following morning four stonemasons were put to work building the wall.

For several days the work proceeded without a hitch.

Then something happened.

The wagons failed to turn up at the proper time and Bob sent Will to find out what was the matter.

The two men who had contracted to do the hauling could not be found, and Will returned and reported the fact to Bob.

"I'll bet this is some of Bailey and Caldwell's work," said the boy.

Bailey and Caldwell were the disgruntled contractors who had failed to secure the work of putting up the wall.

"What are you going to do?" asked Will.

"Do you know where the wagons are?"

"Riley's is in his yard and the horse in his stable."

"And Benton's?"

"I couldn't tell you."

"Well, you stay here and keep an eye on the masons. I'll see what I can do."

Bob went to the proprietor of the village hotel and asked him if he knew where he could hire a man who could drive a cart.

The hotel man referred him to two or three men who were out of work.

With their addresses in his pocket Bob lost no time in calling on one of them.

He was at home and Bob hired him for the day, with the possibility of longer employment.

He took the man around to Riley's house, and finding that Mrs. Riley had no idea where her husband had gone that morning, Bob told her he was going to take the cart and the horse and use them.

The woman offered no objection as she knew her husband had been hired to do carting for the boy, and so the cart,

in charge of the new driver, was soon on its way to the scene of the contract.

Bob then went over to the house of the other cartman, whose name was Benton, and found out where he kept his cart and horse.

Securing another driver he got possession of Benton's team and put it into immediate commission.

Several hours were lost that morning, but it resulted in no delay to the work, owing to the prompt action of the young contractor.

That evening Bob called on Riley and demanded an explanation.

"Why didn't you turn up this morning with your cart?" he asked him.

Riley was profuse in his apologies, claiming that he had been unexpectedly called to the next town on business.

"Then why didn't you send some one in your place?" asked Bob, sharply.

"I had no time to hunt a man up."

"How did you expect me to get along without your team?"

Riley scratched his ear and looked foolish.

"Isn't it a fact that you were induced to stay away by somebody interested in putting me in a hole?"

Riley denied that such had been the case.

"Well, I suppose your wife told you that I took the liberty of using your horse and cart with another driver?"

"That was all right," answered Riley. "I ain't kicking."

"Are you going to be on the job in the morning?"

"Sure I am."

"See that you are or you will forfeit what you have earned so far."

That caused Riley to remember that there was a clause in his agreement to that effect and he assured Bob that the thing wouldn't happen again.

"I hope not," replied Bob, who then left his cottage and went to see Benton.

Benton had some lame excuse to account for his absence.

Wherever he had been that day he was disgusted to learn, on his return home, that Bob had appropriated his horse and cart and used them with another driver.

He made a kick with the man who stabled his rig, but as Bob had secured an order for the team from Benton's wife, his kick went for nothing.

Bob was satisfied that Benton's excuse was pure fiction and demanded to know if he intended to carry out his hauling agreement.

"Of course I do," he replied.

"Well, if you don't show up in the morning you'll be out of it and I'll pay you nothing for the work you've already done."

Benton said he'd be on hand, and Bob departed.

On the following morning Riley and Benton were both on hand with their carts, and work went on as before.

"I'm satisfied that my rivals were at the bottom of this trick," said Bob to Will that evening on his return to Jerry Long's cottage, where the boys continued to board. "Just the same Bailey and Caldwell didn't make anything by their trick. In fact, they're out whatever money they paid the two drivers to go back on me."

On the following Monday two of the four masons failed

to show up, and Bob was greatly disgusted over their apparent desertion.

He laid it to their having been tampered with by Bailey and Caldwell.

He at once called at the homes of the men and learned from their wives that their husbands had started to work as usual.

"Well, your husband hasn't shown up on the job, so I'll have to get another to take his place," said the young contractor, to one of the women. "I've got no time to fool with men who can't stick to business."

Bob went to the hotel and telephoned to the next town for two masons to come prepared to work.

They appeared in time to go to work that afternoon, and Bob got them a place to stay in the village while the job lasted.

The two masons who had been working the previous week heard that their places had been taken by strangers and they woke up to the fact that they had been persuaded to monkey with the wrong kind of a boy.

As they owed the loss of their jobs to Bailey and Caldwell they called on those gentlemen and made a big kick.

The two contractors said they'd make it all right with them as they were figuring on a foundation job which one or the other of them expected to get, and sent them away with an extra \$5 bill in their pockets.

"There's no use talking, Bailey," said Caldwell, "that boy is smarter than we took him to be. We've got to try some new scheme if we expect to get back at him."

"What shall we do?" asked Bailey.

"I should say that the best thing is to get him out of the way."

"How will we do it?"

"He lives with Jerry Long at his cottage by the lake."

"I know he does."

"Jerry spends his afternoons and evenings at the tavern."

"Well?"

"I'll write a note in a disguised hand, and sign the tavern keeper's name to it, saying that Jerry has been taken with a fit, and ask Brandon to come over and take charge of him."

"What do you expect to gain by that?"

"He'll start for the tavern as soon as he gets the note and we must lie in wait for him along the road with a light wagon. I'll grab him as he goes by and you must throw a sack over his head. Then we'll secure and bind him so he can't do anything. We'll put him in the wagon and drive over to the railroad. There we'll dump him into one of the freight cars that will be picked up by the night freight bound to New York. He won't be discovered till some time to-morrow, when the train reaches its destination. In the morning we'll get somebody to tell the men on the job that their boss has skipped out and left them in the lurch. They will quit work, and when Mr. Reynolds sees his work at a standstill he'll get disgusted and is liable to hire either of us to take hold and go on with it. What do you think about it?"

"It isn't bad. I'll stand in with you and we'll pull it through."

"I thought you would. I'll provide the wagon and what-

ever else is needed and you can meet me outside the tavern at eight o'clock."

"I'll be on hand," said Bailey.

The two contractors then parted to meet later as agreed on.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAPTURE OF BOB.

After work was through for the day Bob and Will returned to Jerry Long's cottage for supper, the former unsuspecting that a plot was on foot to get him away from the neighborhood that night.

Jerry himself seldom came home for supper, as the tavern keeper and he were such great friends that Jerry took his evening meal with him more often than not.

About eight o'clock, while Bob, Will and Lucy Long were playing cards in the living room, there came a knock at the front door.

Will answered the summons and returned with a note for Bob.

"A boy brought this and told me to give it to you," said Will. "He said it was important."

"Important, eh? Is he waiting for an answer?" asked Bob.

"No. He went back toward the village."

"I wonder who has a message of importance to send me?" said Bob.

"Why don't you open the envelope and find out?"

Bob tore open the envelope and what he read startled him not a little.

The letter was apparently from the tavern keeper, and said that Jerry Long had been taken with some kind of a fit and he wanted Bob to come there at once and take charge of him.

"Get your hat, Will, and come with me," said Bob, who said nothing to Lucy about what the note contained, as he knew the intelligence would alarm and worry her.

"Where are you going?" asked Will in some surprise.

"To the village."

"Gee! That's quite a walk. What's up?"

"I'll tell you when we get outside."

So Will got his hat and followed him out of the house.

Bob then told him who the note was from, and what it said.

"Had a fit, eh? He must be pretty bad for the tavern keeper to send for you. It would be tough on Lucy if he should die."

"It doesn't say in the note that he's as bad as that; but I thought I'd have you go along, both for company, and so that you could come back and bring Lucy if it was necessary for her to come."

As the boys hurried along up the road Will picked up a stout stick that lay in his path and used it as a walking cane.

"Say, there's a horse and wagon standing at one side of the road ahead," said Will, suddenly. "I wonder what it's doing there?"

"I couldn't tell you," replied Bob. "Maybe it's a breakdown."

They kept to the side of the road opposite the vehicle so as to pass it.

When they got close to it they saw that it was not a breakdown, but just a rig hitched to the fence.

What struck both of them as singular was that no one was near it.

Hardly had they passed the wagon when two men, with thick veils across their faces, suddenly rushed at them from the bushes.

One of the men held something in his hand that looked like a bag.

"Look out! Run, Bob, run!" shouted Will, taking to his heels.

Before Bob could follow his example one of the disguised men grabbed him by the arm.

The boy whirled around and struck him a staggering blow in the face that caused him to release his hold just as his companion raised the bag to envelop Bob's head in its folds.

Bob then jumped around the horse's head.

The two men followed.

The boy, with the agility of a monkey, rushed to the rear of the wagon, and came out into the middle of the road again.

He spied the stick that Will had dropped in his excitement, and picking it up started on the run down the road.

He supposed, in common with Will, that these men were footpads and thought their purpose was to rob him.

The man chased him a short distance, but seeing that he was fleeter footed than themselves, they gave up the pursuit and stopped to consult.

Bob came up with Will at the turn of the road, something over a hundred yards away.

"They've given us up as a bad job," he said.

"Gee! I was afraid they had you," said Will.

"They came near it. When you saw I was almost nabbed you ought to have gone back, picked up your stick and helped me out. However, it's all right. I got away by slugging the fellow who seized me. I'll bet he felt the blow I gave him. The other man tried to put a bag over my head, but he didn't succeed."

"I guess they stole that horse and wagon," said Will.

"I shouldn't be surprised. I dare say that kind of chaps would steal anything they could get away with," replied Bob.

At that moment they heard the rattle of wagon wheels behind them.

"Say, they're coming after us in their rig," said Will. "We can't outrun a horse so we'd better hide in the bushes."

Bob thought his companion's suggestion good, so both lads left the highway and hid in the bushes behind the fence.

The wagon came up at a smart clip, and then rattled by. The two men who had attacked them were on the seat.

"We fooled them," chuckled Will. "They think we're further on."

"They wouldn't have made much out of us if they had caught us," said Bob.

"I'll bet they wouldn't."

They were now approaching the village, and right ahead another road connected with the one they were on at an acute angle.

As there was no sign of the wagon ahead they concluded

that it had either gone on to the village or turned into the connecting road.

In any case they judged they were no longer in danger from the two rascals.

It happened, however, that the two men, who the reader has surmised were Bailey and Caldwell, the rival contractors, after failing to overtake the boys, came to the correct conclusion that the lads had heard their approach and hidden themselves in the bushes.

"We have evidently passed them," said Caldwell, "and they won't come along till they think we're out of the way. Now we can play a march on them by driving up this other road a little way, tie the horse, and then come back here and hide in the bushes close to where they're sure to pass. We'd better head them off instead of waiting for them to pass, and we must take care to make sure of Brandon this time."

"Your suggestion is a good one," said Bailey. "We'll act on it."

Accordingly they drove up the other road a bit, hitched the horse and then hastened back to the junction of the two roads.

In a few minutes they spied Bob and Will coming up the county road, quite unsuspecting of the ambush that lay in their path.

"They think they've given us the slip," chuckled Caldwell. "We'll give them the surprise of their lives in a minute or two."

"Brandon is on our side, too. How lucky!" replied Bailey.

Bob was swinging his stick carelessly to and fro and he and Will came on at a smart pace.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the men jumped out of the bushes close to Bob.

Caldwell, not caring to take any more chances with the bag if he could help it, struck Bob a heavy blow with his fist in the mouth, and as he fell back Bailey grabbed hold of him with both hands.

The boys were taken entirely by surprise, but this time Will did not run.

He saw that his companion was captured, and he stood by him like a little major.

As Bob dropped his stick, for he couldn't use it under the circumstances, Will picked it up.

Caldwell seized the bag from his companion's arm and forced it over Bob's head.

"Blame you, let go of him!" shouted Will, swinging the stick at Caldwell's head.

Had the blow taken effect the man would probably have been stunned.

It missed his head and landed on his arm and shoulder.

He uttered an exclamation of pain and dashed at Will.

Will struck at him again, but Caldwell caught the stick and tried to wrench it from him.

Will pulled him forward and the veil became loosened and fell off, which gave the boy a look at his countenance.

The lad did not know Caldwell, so he did not recognize him, but the chances were he'd know him if he saw him again.

Caldwell, with a jerk, succeeded in getting possession of the stick and Will had to draw back to avoid the blow the man aimed at him.

Caldwell followed him up so closely that Will was obliged to retreat to save himself.

In the meantime Bailey was having a strenuous time holding Bob, notwithstanding that the boy was handicapped by the bag over his head.

"Let that chap go, and give me a hand," he called to his companion.

At that moment Will stooped, picked up a stone and sent it whizzing at Caldwell.

It struck the contractor on the side of the head, inflicting a jagged wound, from which the blood flowed freely.

The blow enraged him and he started for Will with anger in his eye.

The boy fired another stone at him and ran off to a safe distance.

Caldwell shook his fist at him and then returned to where his companion was holding Bob, who was quite exhausted by this time.

"Get hold of his legs and we'll carry him to the wagon," said Bailey.

"Wait till I tie his hands together," said Caldwell.

He pulled a piece of cord out of his pocket and speedily accomplished the job.

They grabbed Bob by the feet and carried him off up the connecting road.

Will watched their movements and followed them to see what their intentions were toward his friend.

He saw them put Bob in the light wagon, mount to the seat and drive toward him in a hurry.

"I wonder what they're running off with him for?" thought Will, crouching down in the bushes to escape observation. "And they're taking him toward the village, too. I supposed they intended to go through his clothes and then leave him in the road. It appears they have some other object in view. I must follow the wagon and see where it goes."

At that moment the wagon shot by and rattled up the road.

CHAPTER X.

THE TABLES ARE TURNED ON THE TWO CONTRACTORS.

Will darted after the wagon, caught on behind and lifting his legs allowed himself to be carried along.

The vehicle soon passed the tavern where Jerry was playing cards with a villager at that moment and then rattled through the main street of the village.

At that hour the thoroughfare was quite deserted, though there were lights in many of the stores and houses.

The wagon turned off in the direction of the railroad, and in fifteen minutes came to the siding where half a dozen freight cars were standing—some entirely empty, and several filled with freight bound either for New York City or points en route.

The vehicle was stopped under a tree and Bailey got down.

Will slid under the wagon and crouched down.

"We'll dump him into one of the empties and close the door on him," Will heard Caldwell say.

"All right," replied Bailey. "Shove him out."

"Here's a piece of cord. Tie his ankles together," said Caldwell.

He tossed the string to his companion and Bailey secured Bob's feet.

Caldwell then leaped down himself.

He and Bailey pulled Bob out of the wagon.

"Lay him down and watch him while I take a look around and make sure no one is about," said Caldwell.

As Caldwell walked off Will thought that was his chance to do something.

There were lots of sticks lying around, and Will, picking one up, left the shelter of the wagon and approached Bailey from behind.

When he got within striking distance of the man he raised the stick and smote the contractor on the head.

Bailey fell over with a groan and lay quite still.

"That settles your hash, Mister Footpad," said Will to himself. "Now to release Bob."

He pulled the bag off his friend's head and found him senseless and partly suffocated.

"Gracious! Bob looks done up. That bag is the cause of it. Here, Bob, wake up—wake up! We want to get away from here mighty quick."

As he spoke Will shook his friend to try and bring him to.

The fresh air, more than Will's efforts, brought Bob to his senses and he sat up.

"That you, Will? I thought I was a prisoner with a bag over my head," he said, looking around, as Will cut him loose.

"So you were up to a few moments ago. There's the bag, and there is one of the men who helped to carry you off in the wagon, which stands yonder."

"What's the matter with him? He looks as if he was knocked out."

"He is. I did it with a stick."

"The dickens you did. Where is the other fellow?"

"Gone off to see if the coast is clear."

"Clear for what?"

"To put you into one of those empty freight cars."

"Freight cars!" ejaculated Bob. "What do you mean?"

"Take a look around and you'll see that we're alongside the railroad."

"How in thunder did I get here?"

"Those two chaps brought you here in their wagon."

"How did you come?"

"I caught on behind, hung on with my hands and they fetched me too, though they didn't know it."

"You say they brought me here to put me in a freight car?" said Bob.

"That's what I heard one of them say."

"Why should they want to do that, I wonder?"

"It seems funny to me. Have they gone through your clothes?"

Bob felt in his pockets and pulled out two \$5 bills.

"No, they haven't."

"I s'pose they meant to before they put you in the car; but I can't see their object in bringing you over here when they could have robbed you just as well where they caught you and then let you slide."

"It is certainly very curious."

"Well, here's your chance to do another bit of crook catching with my assistance," said Will. "We've got one of them safe enough. All we have to do is to slug the

other when he comes back. Then we'll carry them in the wagon to the constable and hand them over to him. That will get your name in the village paper again, with mine as your side partner."

"By George! We'll do it. We'd better tie up this other fellow while we're waiting."

Bob picked up a piece of the cord which had been used on his own hands and bent over the unconscious contractor.

Bailey was not wearing the veil over his face now and the boy caught an imperfect view of the man's countenance.

He had seen both Bailey and Caldwell about the village, and knew they were the contractors who had bid unsuccessfully on the stone wall contract which he had captured.

The man's face looked so familiar to him that, taking off his hat, he struck a match behind it and held it over the contractor's face.

He recognized the man at once.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed in a tone that attracted Will's attention.

"What's the matter?" asked Will.

"Why this isn't a crook. It's Bailey, one of the village contractors."

"It is?" exclaimed Will.

"Yes. I begin to see a light. I'll bet the other is Caldwell. They've been trying to injure me ever since I started on the stone wall, as you know. It is now plain to me that their object in waylaying me to-night was to get me away from this place so they could queer me on my contract."

"Gee! I guess you're right," said Will.

"They've treated me pretty roughly, and it was a low down trick to put up this job on me."

"That's what it was."

"They ought to be punished for it."

"Bet your life they ought."

"I've got evidence enough against them to put them in a hole."

"You have for a fact."

"We can both swear that they attacked us twice on the county road."

"We can."

"That they put a bag over my head and nearly suffocated me, besides binding me hand and foot."

"That's right. I'll swear I found you unconscious when I took the bag off your head, and that your hands and ankles were tied."

"I'll tie Bailey so he can't get away if he comes to his senses, and then we will lay for the other. If he turns out to be Caldwell, as I'm sure he will, we'll make him sick of this night's work."

Bob tied the unconscious Bailey's hands together, and then they heard Caldwell coming back.

The boys hid behind the end of the wagon and watched. Caldwell came up and at first didn't see his companion stretched out on the ground, or if he did took him for Bob.

"Where are you, Bailey?" he called out in a low tone.

But Bailey didn't answer because he couldn't.

Looking around he appeared to recognize his associate.

"Hello! What are you lying there for?"

Not a move nor a reply from Bailey.

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you answer?" asked Caldwell, impatiently.

Surprised and mystified by what he took to be his associate's curious behavior he bent down and discovered the true state of affairs.

He uttered an exclamation of alarm and glanced about for their prisoner.

Of course he didn't see him, but he saw the bag lying in a heap on the ground.

"Escaped!" he cried. "Then he must have done Bailey up."

Bob, who had made a running noose out of the remaining piece of line, crept up behind Caldwell and dropping it over his head and arms pulled it tight.

"Grab him, Will!" he cried, and Will darted forward, seized the contractor and held him while Bob knotted the rope. "Now, Mister Highwayman," continued the boy, pretending that he took the contractor for a crook, "we've got you where the hair is short."

With that they upset Caldwell on the ground and sat upon him.

"Here, let me up. What's the matter with you two? I'm no highwayman."

"Then you're a kidnapper, for you attacked me on the county road with your companion and brought me to the railroad for the purpose of sending me off somewhere in an empty freight car," replied Bob.

Caldwell began to realize that he was in a bad box.

That the tables had been turned on him and Bailey by the boy they had expected to do up, and that the consequences were likely to be unpleasant.

"It's all a mistake," he said.

"You mean you and your companion made the mistake of supposing I was an easy proposition to handle. Well, you see, I'm not," chuckled Bob.

"We were only playing a joke on you," said the contractor.

"It was rather a serious kind of a joke. You'll have the chance of making all the explanation you want to Constable Howe."

The idea of being carried before the constable of the village and charged with assault gave Caldwell a cold sweat.

"Oh, come now, let me loose and I'll make it all right with you."

"I never compromise with crooks."

"I'm not a crook. My name is Caldwell, and I belong in the village."

"Get out. There's only one Caldwell in the village and he's a contractor. He wouldn't be guilty of such a mean trick as you've played on me."

The man remained silent for a moment, feeling pretty small.

"I'm Caldwell, the contractor, and I'm willing to make this thing all right."

"If you're Caldwell, the contractor, who is your friend? Perhaps he's Bailey, your business rival."

"He is."

"I suppose you and Bailey put the job up on me to get me out of this neighborhood so that you could queer my contract with Mr. Reynolds. Is that it?"

"Look here, Brandon, what'll you take to call this thing off?"

"Nothing. This is only one of your tricks. You got my two cartmen to leave me in the lurch last week, and finding that didn't work you got two of my masons to quit work. You see, I'm dead on to you both, and now that I've caught you in this last trick I'm going to make an example of both of you chaps."

"I'll give you \$100 if you let up on us."

"I wouldn't take a cent from you. What I want is satisfaction, and I'm going to get it. Come, Will, help me put these two chaps into the wagon, and then we'll see what Justice Mills will have to say about the matter in the morning."

Caldwell pleaded with Bob not to expose him and Bailey, but the boy wouldn't listen to him.

He had the upper hand of the two contractors and he was going to press his advantage to the limit.

With Will's help he got both men into the wagon, and then the boys, mounting the seat, drove off to the residence of the head constable of the village.

CHAPTER XI.

BOB LETS UP ON THE TWO CONTRACTORS.

Bailey came to his senses on the way and was astonished to find himself and his companion prisoners in the power of the boy they had tried to get rid of.

Lying close together Caldwell and he held a pow-wow over the situation.

Caldwell told Bailey that Brandon intended to hand them over to the constable and charge them with assault.

Bailey was much disturbed to hear that.

"We're in a pretty bad box," he said. "We must try to compromise this affair."

"He won't compromise. I tried my best to get him to let up on us but he won't. I even offered him \$100."

"I'd give \$200 myself to be out of this thing. We were fools to engage in it. We didn't figure on the possible consequences."

"We'll be ruined in the village even if we should escape going to prison," said Caldwell. "We'll never be able to do any more business, and people will say we only got what we deserved."

"We'll have to move away. It's pretty hard to think about. I'd rather lose \$500 than face the consequences."

"So would I, but I guess we won't have any say about it. Just think of being delivered over to the constable in this shape, like a pair of criminals."

Bailey finally called out to Bob.

"What do you want?" asked the young contractor.

"We'll pay you \$500 each if you will agree not to prosecute us," said Bailey.

"No," replied Bob, "neither of you have got money enough to buy me off."

"Then you intend to put us in jail and ruin us?"

"You tried to ruin me with my contract job just because you were jealous that I got it away from you. You meant to send me off somewhere in an empty freight car. Suppose you had succeeded in your design and the car had been sidetracked somewhere along the route and I starved to death, what then?"

"Well, we're sorry for acting against you, and will do anything to make it all right."

"You are sorry because you have been caught and have the prospect of punishment before your eyes."

"We are sorry anyway."

"If you won't have any mercy on us think of our families. They'll be disgraced if we are sent to prison," put in Caldwell.

"You should have thought of that before you engaged in the enterprise."

They were now approaching the constable's house.

At the corner of the street Bob reined in.

He had decided not to prosecute the men as he did not want to ruin them, notwithstanding that they had treated him in such a scurvy way.

"I'll bet I have frightened them clear through, and for the sake of their families I'll let them go," he said to Will in a low tone. "Hold the reins."

Then he jumped into the wagon.

"Look here, if I let up on you will you promise to let me alone in the future?"

"Yes," cried the men eagerly, "and we'll each give you \$500 to square matters."

"I told you before that I didn't want your money," replied Bob. "I'll let you go on your promise to behave yourselves hereafter toward me."

"We'll do that," replied Caldwell. "We won't interfere with you any more. We've learned a lesson to-night that we won't soon forget. We are willing to admit that you're too smart for us. We apologize for what we've done to you. You see we were mad that a stranger like you should get work that we considered one of us was entitled to. After this if you beat us out on a bid we won't have anything to say, and further, if you want any help from us we'll give it to you."

Bob made no reply, but cut their bonds.

"This rig belongs to one of you, I suppose," said the boy.

"It belongs to me," answered Caldwell.

"Now, look here, did one of you send that message to me to-night about Jerry Long having a fit?"

"I sent it," replied Caldwell.

"Then Jerry isn't ill?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"And the purpose of the note was simply to get me out of the cottage so that you and Bailey could waylay me along the road?"

"I admit it."

"All right. As it's some distance from here to Jerry's cottage I'm going to drive there. Then you can have your team and drive back home. You may thank your stars that I have let up on you. Otherwise you know what you would have been up against."

Bob mounted to the seat again and drove off toward the lake, the two contractors sitting in the body of the wagon very much relieved to know that they were not going to spend the night in the lock-up, and face the justice in the morning.

On reaching Jerry's cottage Bob turned the rig over to Caldwell and then he and Will got down and entered the house.

After that Bob had no further trouble with his contract for building the wall on Mr. Reynolds's property.

In due time it was finished to the satisfaction of the owner, and Bob found himself richer by \$300, after deducting all the expenses of the job, including the \$50 he had paid for the lease of the land where he got his stone.

"How much are you worth now, Bob?" asked Will.

"I am worth \$850."

"That's just ten times as much as I'm worth."

"Well, you aren't kicking, are you?"

"No. I'm satisfied. By the way, what are you going to do with that land? It's yours for more than ten months yet."

"I don't know that I'll do anything with it. I simply leased it for the right to take the stone from it, and I may have no further use for it."

"You might have got the stone from the island in the lake for nothing."

"But think what it would have cost me to bring it from there to the outskirts of the village. I'm \$100 in by leasing that land, and Mr. Reynolds got his wall put up \$50 cheaper."

"What do you expect to do next?"

"I've put in a bid to build the new church, and Mr. Reynolds is backing me."

"I suppose Caldwell and Bailey are against you," said Will.

"Of course, and also a contractor from the next town."

"Then I'm thinking you won't get it."

"What's the reason I won't if my bid is the lowest?"

"But will it be the lowest?"

"That remains to be seen. I've got one advantage"

"What is that?"

"I can build the cellar cheaper than the other contractors because I can get the stone from my leased ground, and they can't get the material nearer than the island in the lake."

"It was a fine idea of yours to think of that land. It's a wonder that neither Bailey nor Caldwell ever thought of it in the past."

"It's the person who thinks of the best way to do things who gets ahead in this world. If you are going to be a successful contractor you've got to use your brains. Bailey and Caldwell have been working in a rut since they came here. If I had figured on getting my stone the same way they have been accustomed to do, the chances are both of them would have beaten me out on my bid. I knew there was stone on Brown's farm, and I went over there and looked at it to see if it would answer. When I was satisfied it would I put in my bid for the wall."

"It's funny that Bailey and Caldwell didn't know about the stone on the farm as well as you. They've been living here for ten years, and ought to be better acquainted with the neighborhood than you."

"Oh, they knew there was stone on Brown's place, but they were so used to going to the island for it that they didn't take the trouble to think up a new way."

"I guess you're right. There are lots of people who do business in the same old way year after year. It becomes second nature with them. They generally go to the wall in the end."

"That's right. You've got to keep up to date to hold your own nowadays," replied Bob.

"Bet your life you have."

When the bids for the church building were opened it was found that Bob's was the lowest by \$100.

As he had Mr. Reynolds's endorsement he was awarded the contract.

The weather being too cold now to permit of operations being started on the foundations of the new church, it was not expected that anything would be done till early in the spring.

As the prospect of doing anything to speak of in the village that winter was not very encouraging, Bob decided to go to the neighboring town of Mansfield to see what he could pick up there.

The train he and Will boarded was one which had come on from S——, the city where he had lived most of his life, and where his father had been employed up to the time of his arrest for the robbery of his employer's safe, and it was going on to Boston.

The car was fairly crowded, the only two vacant seats being at one end, behind two men, one of whom was sandy haired, with a sharp looking countenance.

The moment Bob got a good look at him he recognized him as Philip Travers, the man who he believed had taken the \$2,000 his father had been convicted of stealing.

"See that man right ahead of me?" he said to Will, grasping his friend by the arm.

"Yes," replied Will.

"That's the chap who was my father's assistant in Tarleton's store at the time my father was accused of stealing the \$2,000 from the office safe."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Will.

"Yes. He is the man I told you I feel sure is the real thief."

"You'll never be able to prove it, I guess."

"I'm afraid not; but the money will never do him any good."

"That fact won't do your father any good."

"That is true, unfortunately."

When the train reached Mansfield and the boys alighted at the station the man with the sandy hair and his companion also got off.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT BOB HEARD IN THE NEXT ROOM.

Bob saw Philip Travers leave the train ahead of him and Will, and he wondered what business had brought him to that town.

He thought it a bit singular that Travers should be away from S——, where he supposed the man was still employed in Tarleton's office, but the fact of the matter was he had been discharged by Tarleton for cause, and after hanging around S—— for a couple of months, associating with rather a fast set of companions, he had come on to Mansfield with one of his particular friends.

Travers was soon lost in the crowd at the station and Bob didn't think about him any more.

As Bob had been obliged to put up \$500 cash security on his church contract he had just \$350 when he landed in Mansfield, and Will had \$75.

It was late in the afternoon, and they decided to put up at a moderate priced hotel for the night and look for a boarding house next day.

As the town was strange to them Bob asked the station agent where they would find a cheap hotel.

"There's the Mansfield House on Jefferson Street near the river. You might try that. It has a free 'bus which meets all trains. If you hurry you may catch it," said the agent.

Bob and Will hurried out on the street and saw a seedy looking vehicle which bore the name "Mansfield House," backed up against the curb.

They got in and Bob was surprised to see Travers and his companion seated in it, too.

They were engaged in a close conversation, carried on in a low tone, and the sandy-haired man did not even glance at the boys.

On the arrival of the 'bus at the hotel the boys got out first, as they were near the door.

Travers and his companion, however, passed them and reached the counter first where they registered and were assigned to a room.

They did not go directly to their room, but strolled into the bar and billiard room.

Bob hung back until they left the counter, for he did not care to be recognized by Travers, and then he and Will put their names on the book and got a room together.

Learning that supper wouldn't be ready for an hour, they put in the time walking around that end of the town.

After supper Bob said he'd treat to the theater, and accordingly they inquired their way to the opera house where they found by the bills that a lurid melodrama called "Escaped From Sing Sing," was to be given that evening by a company from New York City.

The play was full of thrills, but it didn't greatly appeal to Bob, though Will seemed to enjoy it hugely.

The show was out about eleven and then Bob treated to oysters.

They got mixed up trying to find their way back to the Mansfield House, so that it was close on to midnight by the time they reached their room.

It didn't take them long to get into bed and Will was asleep in five minutes.

It was different with Bob.

He couldn't get to sleep to save his life.

In tossing around his arm had struck the partition and it gave out a sound that convinced him it was only wood covered with wall paper.

Apparently their room and the adjoining one on that side were really one apartment that had been subdivided by a board partition.

The fact did not particularly impress Bob, and finally, after nearly an hour, he was just dozing off when the door of the next room was opened and two persons entered in so noisy a manner that he was startled into wakefulness again.

Their voices reached him as plainly as if they had been in the same room.

They appeared to be in an exhilarated mood, as if they had been indulging in quite a number of high balls.

Bob was vexed at being disturbed just as he was sinking to slumber, especially as the hilarious behavior of the

guests who had taken possession of the next room promised to keep him awake some time.

He heard chairs pulled around and then a brief silence.

This was broken by the jingling of glasses and a voice exclaimed:

"Here's looking at you, Travers."

At the mention of the name Travers, Bob's attention instantly became riveted to the next room.

It was evident that the sandy-haired bookkeeper and his traveling companion had been assigned to that room.

"The same to you, Jessup," replied Travers.

A momentary silence followed as the men drank.

"Now we'll take a look at the swag," said Jessup. "We must have pinched all of \$20,000 worth of jewelry and cash to-night. I told you it would be as easy as rolling off a log to crack that crib. That will be \$10,000 apiece. It tops that little job you did a few months ago when you swiped \$2,000 from your boss's safe, and got another man sent away for the job. That was decidedly clever, I'll admit. You never told me how you got hold of the combination of the safe. It was shown at the trial of Brandon that only he and the boss had the combination. That is what convicted him. No suspicion fell on you because you did not have access to the safe. Now how did you manage to get the combination, for you must have got it somehow or you couldn't have opened the safe and got the money you knew was there that night?"

"Why, I found it accidentally when rummaging in Brandon's private drawer. I thought he kept Tarleton's check-book there, and as I'm pretty neat at imitating 'most any kind of writing I wanted to secure a blank check and raise the wind that way. I didn't find what I was looking for, but I found the combination of the safe and copied it down for future use. The chance came when Tarleton put the money in the safe overnight just before Brandon left the office to be gone a week. He told me that he had borrowed enough to take his wife South but not enough to enable him to remain away with her. I knew if I took the money that he would be accused of the theft, but though he had done me a good favor I couldn't let such a good chance of feathering my nest get away from me."

"Of course you couldn't. You'd have been a fool if you had," said Jessup.

"I felt kind of sorry for him when he was sent away for the job he didn't commit, especially as the shock of his arrest killed his wife, but I couldn't help him without giving myself away, and so——"

"Charity begins at home," chuckled Jessup.

"However, he broke prison with three others soon after he was put in the penitentiary, and though the others were nabbed and taken back, he was never captured."

"Well, never mind him now. Let's go over our plunder. The judge will be a wild man when he finds out that his home was cleaned out while he and his family were attending a wedding at S——. It always does me good to get back at those big wigs who have no mercy on gents of our profession when we're brought before them. One good turn always deserves another," and Jessup laughed gleefully.

Bob was now very wide awake, indeed, and amazed at what he heard.

Jessup was without doubt a professional crook and had

induced Travers to join him in the commission of a burglary of some magnitude.

Learning that a certain judge who lived in Mansfield would be absent with his family over night to attend a wedding in S——, Jessup had evidently conceived the plan of coming on to the town with Travers and going through the judge's house.

They had just returned from that adventure, which appeared to have panned out remarkably well.

During the next fifteen minutes Bob heard them commenting on the value of different articles of valuable jewelry.

After they had returned the plunder to a hand bag they took another drink, and then Jessup said it was time for them to turn in, as they had left an early call at the office so as to catch the five o'clock train for the West.

They talked over the good time they expected to have in Chicago as they took off their clothes, and then they got into bed.

After that silence reigned in the next room.

CHAPTER XIII.

BOB SECURES HIS FATHER'S PARDON.

Bob lay and thought for awhile over the discovery he had made.

Then he made up his mind to dress, inquire his way to the nearest police station and relate what he had learned.

That would undoubtedly lead to the arrest of Travers and Jessup, and the recovery of the stolen property.

Taking care not to arouse Will he got up, put on his clothes and went downstairs to the office.

The night clerk looked at him with some surprise when he asked where the nearest station house was, but gave him the information.

Fifteen minutes later he was telling his story to the officers in charge.

"You haven't mentioned the name of the judge whose house you say was entered and robbed by these two men," said the policeman.

"I didn't hear them say what his name was," replied Bob.

"He's away in Springfield with his family attending a wedding, you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, go in that little room there and I'll investigate the matter."

The officer rang up his superior at his house and gave him the points of the case.

The captain considering the matter of great importance said he'd come to the station right away and see the boy.

He directed the officer to telephone to certain people and try to find out which of the judges was out of town.

It happened that the first person the officer called up was able to give him just the information he wanted.

He said that Judge Townsend, presiding at the County Court, had gone to S—— that morning to attend the wedding of the daughter of an old college mate, and that he would be back next day.

The officer ascertained where Judge Townsend lived from the directory, and telephoned the station house nearest his house word that the judge's residence had been reported

as having been burglarized, and he wanted a detective sent to find out whether the report was true or not.

After Bob had been waiting about twenty minutes in the little room the captain of the station appeared and asked him to repeat his story, which he did.

He questioned the boy closely and became satisfied that what Bob had stated must be the truth.

By that time word was telephoned the station that on investigation it was found that Judge Townsend's house had been robbed.

That positively confirmed Bob's story.

Taking three officers with him the captain, accompanied by Bob, set out for the Mansfield House.

"Two men registered at this house late this afternoon by the name of Jessup and Travers, didn't they?" asked the captain stepping up to the desk.

The night clerk looked over the book and shook his head.

"No, sir. Those names do not appear on the register."

"Let me look, please," said Bob.

He ran his finger up the list till he reached his own name and Will's.

Travers and his companion had registered right before him, but they had put down false names.

"Those are the two men," he said, pointing the names out to the captain. "They registered under fictitious names."

"How do you know they are the men?"

"Because they signed the book before my friend and I put our names down. Besides there is the number of the room down there. That's the room next to the one given to us."

"You're able to identify them, aren't you?"

"I am."

"Come up with us," the captain said to the night clerk.

The clerk called the night porter to take his place behind the counter, and then the party proceeded upstairs to the corridor on which Bob's room and the other opened.

The captain instructed the clerk to knock at the men's door and ask them to open it.

This he did and soon Jessup's voice was heard asking who was there.

"I'm the night clerk. I want to see you a moment."

"What do you want?"

"Open the door."

It soon became evident that Jessup didn't want to do that.

The captain grew impatient.

He put his shoulder to it and the door yielded with a crash.

The officers rushed in to the consternation of the occupants.

Bob pointed out which was Jessup.

"You are under arrest, my men," said the captain, brusquely.

"Under arrest!" cried Jessup. "What for?"

"Burglarizing Judge Townsend's residence on Springfield Avenue to-night. Put on your clothes and come with us."

Jessup started to protest, but the captain cut him short.

"What have you done with the swag?"

Jessup, of course, wouldn't give any information on the subject, but a search of the room soon brought it to light concealed under the mattress.

The policemen marched their prisoners off and Bob was permitted to remain and go to bed, after being directed to report at the station at a certain hour in the morning.

On returning to his room Bob found Will still sound asleep and of course unconscious of what had happened in the next room.

It was eight o'clock before Bob awoke in the morning, and he saw Will already dressed and standing by the window looking out.

He jumped up and while dressing he astonished his companion with his story.

"Well if that doesn't beat the Dutch," said Will.

Then they went to breakfast.

A telegraph message had been sent to Judge Townsend acquainting him with the fact that his residence had been robbed the night previous, and asking him to come on as soon as possible.

He took an early train and reached Mansfield about noon.

Then he heard all the particulars.

He identified his property and the two men were held for trial.

Then the judge sent for Bob, thanked him for the service he had rendered him and presented him with his check for \$1,000.

Bob took the opportunity to tell the judge about his father's misfortune in having been convicted and sent to the State prison for a crime he had not committed, but which had been put through by Travers.

He asked Judge Townsend if something couldn't be done to establish his father's innocence.

The judge promised to see what could be done.

He called at the jail and had a talk with Travers.

The ex-bookkeeper at first denied that he had had any hand in the matter, but when the judge promised to make things easy for him on the charge he was now held on if he would clear Bob's father by a full confession, he consented to make it.

He did so before a notary, and signed it in the presence of the judge.

Judge Townsend then sent the document, enclosed in an explanatory letter, to the governor of the State, requesting that Brandon be pardoned and restored to his citizenship.

The governor, after weighing the facts, made out Brandon's pardon, and sent it to Judge Townsend, who turned it over to Bob.

All this took time and it was the first of March when Bob got his father's pardon.

In the meantime Will had secured a job in Mansfield that kept him busy, while Bob worked on sundry small contracts that he managed to pick up.

After getting the pardon the problem that confronted Bob was how he was to convey the good news to his father.

Believing that Mr. Brandon had made his way to Canada he inserted advertisements in the most important Canadian newspapers.

It was now time for him to think of returning to Malden village to commence work on his church contract.

"What are you going to do, Will, stay in Mansfield or return to Malden with me and resume work at \$1.25 a day?" he asked his friend.

"I'm going with you, old man," replied Will, promptly.

"All right; I shall be glad to have you for my assistant.

I shall raise your wages as soon as I can afford to. One of these days when I'm a big contractor I hope to have you for one of my superintendents. Then you'll make good money."

CHAPTER XIV.

A GREWSOME DISCOVERY.

As soon as Bob and Will got back to Malden village they took up their residence again at Jerry Long's cottage on the margin of Clear Lake.

Bob had been in correspondence with Lucy Long while he was away at Mansfield and she kept him informed of all that was going on at Malden.

Jerry had had a falling out with his friend the tavern keeper, and in consequence had quit drinking, and was now steadily employed felling trees and clearing several acres of land for Mr. Reynolds.

Bob lost no time in getting to work on his contract.

He started a gang excavating for the foundation of the church, and Will, as before, had charge of the stone end of the business.

Masons were soon employed and the foundation walls rose like magic.

The body of the new edifice was to be constructed of brick, and this was started the moment the foundation was ready.

The interior carpenter work, such as the floors, windows, doors, and other parts Bob sub-let to the head village carpenter, who worked in conjunction with the bricklayers.

The roof and small steeple were also to be built by this man, but Bob was responsible for the whole job, and kept a sharp eye on the work to see that the specifications were carried out to the letter.

It was well in May when he finally delivered the church, fully completed, over to the trustees and it was accepted and paid for.

Bob cleared a matter of \$700 on this contract, making him worth close on to \$3,000, while Will now had \$150 to his credit in the village bank.

The young contractor signalized the completion of his most important contract thus far by giving a picnic to his boy and girl friends of the village during the last week in May.

He put Lucy Long in charge of the arrangements, and the outing was held on Bob's thirty-acre leased farm.

About an acre of the place was covered by a wood, and the picnic was held in that spot.

Bob, Will and Jerry Long devoted several days to clearing a place especially for the occasion.

They built a long table and a number of benches to accommodate the picknickers.

The refreshments, which were quite substantial, were provided at Bob's own expense, and he paid for the two light wagons needed to carry his guests to the spot.

The day turned out a particularly fine one, and no one invited stayed away.

All kinds of games were indulged in, and everybody present declared they were having a bang-up time.

At the conclusion of the dinner Bob was called on for a speech, and he made one.

Some of the other boys, and even two of the girls, got

up and had something to say, chiefly complimentary of the young contractor.

Bob had always been well liked, but he was now voted the most popular young man in the village, and the smartest one, too.

As the young contractor was figuring on a rough stone bridge that the county proposed to put across a narrow stream now spanned by an old wooden bridge that had been condemned as verging on the dangerous, he was not sure that his supply of stone would hold out.

So after the dinner he called Will and they slipped away from the company and started off to investigate the woods to see if any more rock was to be found on the property.

Among the hundreds of trees on the farm was one giant oak, more than a hundred years old, which towered above its fellows, and was a kind of landmark in that neighborhood.

When Bob revisited his property just before he began work on his church contract he noticed that this chap no longer held itself up as straight as a die, like a stalwart sentinel, but was leaning over at an angle of twenty odd degrees.

He had remarked to Will at the time that the tree was evidently weakened at the roots and would fall before many weeks, probably as soon as struck by a heavy wind blowing in the direction of the angle it was sagging.

His prognostication proved correct, even without the wind, for it seemed as if the tree dropped over more and more every little while.

On the day of the picnic, when the party drove up to the farm, Bob noticed that the giant land mark was no longer in sight.

As it was hanging pretty high up the day before the boy concluded that it had fallen during the night, which was the fact.

"Let's go over and take a look at that fallen tree," suggested Bob, when he and Will separated themselves from the rest of the party.

It was only a short walk to the spot, and there, sure enough, lay the fallen giant prone on the ground, resting on several small trees its weight had crushed to the earth.

Its immense roots, covered with earth, pointed skyward and at a score of other angles, leaving exposed a great hole in the base of the rocky ledge against which it had stood.

Bob leaped up on top of the roots while Will sprang over the trunk, both intent on getting a view of the hole it had left in the ground and rock.

From his elevated perch Bob got a good view of the hole which extended right into the rocky ledge.

What he saw in the hole caused him to utter an exclamation of amazement.

In the excavation reposed two small iron boxes, covered with thick-headed nails, and stretched out beside the boxes lay a complete skeleton of a human being.

"My gracious!" cried Bob.

At that moment Will got a sight of the grewsome spectacle and he drew back with a startled ejaculation.

"It's a skeleton," he palpitated. "Perhaps the remains of some man murdered years ago in this wood."

"I shouldn't be surprised," returned Bob. "Look at those boxes. I wonder what is in them?"

A rush of chattering boys and girls toward the fallen

tree attracted Bob's attention from the astonishing discovery he and Will had just made.

The moment the girls caught sight of the skeleton they screamed and beat an immediate retreat.

Some of the boys were a bit scared, but most of them did not mind the sight a bit, though they were greatly surprised.

Bob jumped down and approached the hole, followed by the bunch.

The grinning skull was rather a disquieting object to gaze on at close quarters.

The boxes looked old and mildewed, with great patches of iron rust all over them.

"What are you going to do with them and the skeleton?" Bob was asked.

"I'll get a heavy hammer from the blacksmith and see if I can batter the iron in," he said; "but it will be time enough to do that to-morrow."

The girls, standing back at a safe distance, were calling for the boys to rejoin them, so Bob, Will and the bunch left the strange scene and returned to the picnic ground.

An hour later Bob took Will aside.

"Look here, Will, as soon as the crowd gets back they'll spread the news of the discovery of the skeleton and the iron boxes at the foot of the fallen tree. That's sure to excite a lot of curiosity and bring a bunch of villagers here. Now those boxes may contain a treasure for all we know, and if they do I don't want the news to get around. According to my lease I can take anything off this farm but the trees and the house. That clause was intended to cover only the stone, of course, but it is not so stated in the lease, consequently I have the legal right to take those boxes away if I choose to. If they were shown to contain a treasure the man who owns the farm would make a big kick, and I'd have a fight on my hands to hold it. Now I'm going to prevent that by taking an option on this property at once. Ten per cent. of the price he wants will do that, or \$120. I'm willing to risk that on the chance that there is something of value in the boxes."

"I think that's a good idea. You'd better call on him right away about it."

"I'm going to. I'll leave you in charge of the picnic."

Thus speaking, Bob started for the village at a swinging gait.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TREASURE THAT LED TO FAME.

Bob found the owner of the farm at home and had no trouble in getting an option on the land for thirty days.

"How are you going to take title?" asked the man. "You are under age."

"I'll get Jerry Long to do it for me," replied Bob.

As soon as the business was finished Bob returned to the picnic ground.

On the way he stopped at a blacksmith shop and borrowed a big hammer and a cold chisel.

He left these articles at the house.

When the picnic broke up and the boys and girls returned in the two wagons to the village, Bob and Will remained behind.

"Now to investigate those boxes before it gets dark,"

Motorcycles Given Away Free!**REGULAR SELLING PRICE \$200.00**

OUR GRAND PREMIUM CONTEST BEGAN IN

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The five readers who send us the largest number of coupons cut from "Happy Days," beginning with No. 787 and ending with No. 798, will each get an

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THIS IS A FAIR AND SQUARE CONTEST**EVERYBODY HAS AN EQUAL CHANCE TO WIN****Get the Coupons!****Get the Coupons!****TRY TO WIN A MOTORCYCLE**

said Bob, who had already told Will that he had practically purchased the farm.

They got the hammer and the chisel and started for the base of the old tree.

The covers of the boxes were secured by locks set on the inside in the fashion of most boxes.

Bob intended to break the catches if he could.

Just as he was about to begin operations on one of them Will stopped him and pointed to the ground beside the skeleton.

There lay a large key, and the inference naturally was that it belonged to one or both of the boxes.

Bob seized it, and after some trouble inserted it in the keyhole of the first box, and succeeded in turning it.

Then they pulled up the cover.

A layer of old clothes met their rather disappointed sight.

Clothes, however, wouldn't make the box so heavy, and Bob began pulling them out to see what was underneath.

The box was half filled with male attire and the rest of it was filled with bags that looked as if they contained money.

"Gee!" cried Will. "It's a treasure, sure enough."

Bob pulled out one of the bags and opened it.

It was filled with ten dollar gold pieces.

"Hurrah!" shouted Will, greatly excited.

Bob was excited, too, for he felt that all this money belonged to him.

"We must get it away, Will, as soon as possible," he said.

Laying down one of the woolen shirts they placed all the bags in it and then carried the treasure to the picnic ground, where they hid it in the trunk of a hollow tree.

Then they returned to the excavation and opened the second box.

It contained a similar number of money bags, also covered with old clothes.

The boys removed the bags to the hollow tree as before.

"I'll tell you what we'll do to prevent the news of a treasure leaking out," said Bob. "We'll fill the boxes half full of stones and return the old clothes on top. Then we'll lock them and leave them for visitors to look at and speculate over what they contain. Afterwards we'll open them before witnesses with the hammer and chisel, and everybody will think the supposed treasure is a fake."

"When they hear I took an option on the land they'll suspect the reason and give me the laugh. However, to be on the safe side I mean to complete the purchase. There must be \$50,000 at least in those bags, and that's worth paying \$1,200 to get."

"Bet your life it is," replied Will.

That night Bob and Will took Jerry's hand-cart, went to the farm and carried the money to Jerry's cottage, and hid it in a box in the barn under the hay.

Next morning a crowd of villagers visited the spot where the skeleton and the two boxes lay.

Bob and Will appeared with the tools, broke open the boxes and "found" them full of stones.

The "discovery" was greeted with great laughter, and the villagers returned to spread the news.

Leaving the boxes open for others to view and comment on, Bob and Will returned to Jerry Long's cottage.

Jerry was away at work, and Bob, under her promise of secrecy, showed the money bags to Lucy.

They carried the bags up to the room occupied by the boys, and counted it.

It counted up \$125,000.

Bob then boxed it up for transportation as he intended to take it to Boston and bank it there.

"I shall give you \$10,000 of it, Will," he said.

"And how much are you going to give me for keeping your secret?" asked Lucy, roguishly.

"I'm going to give you a whack at the whole of it when we are married," he replied, whereat she blushed and looked pleased, as most any girl would under the circumstances.

Bob didn't bid on the stone bridge for the county, but went to Boston instead with Will and the treasure.

"Now that I have a bunch of money I'm going to spread myself as a contractor, Will," he said. "I'll hire an office on Devonshire Street and look out for some big job. You shall be my chief assistant, and your pay will begin at \$10 a week."

Bob would have been thoroughly happy now if he could have found his father.

His advertisements in the Canadian papers had produced no results.

With plenty of money at hand he decided to advertise on a wider plan, and consulted with an advertising agency as to the best method to pursue.

The manager agreed, for a certain sum, to make a very extensive effort to find Mr. Brandon, and he was able to place the advertisement at better advantage than Bob could have done himself.

Our young contractor opened an office in one of the big buildings on Devonshire Street, and began to look up a job that would, in his estimation, be worth his while.

One day he read in a certain paper taken by contractors that bids would be received by the government for the construction of a breakwater off a certain port.

Plans and specifications could be seen and studied at the office of the engineer for the district of New England at Portsmouth, N. H.

Ten per cent. of the amount of the bid, either in cash or by certified check, would have to accompany the bid.

Bob decided to have a look in at the job, though it seemed to be one beyond his ability to grapple with.

He called at the engineer's office, read the specifications over carefully and looked at the plans.

Deciding that he would figure on the job, even if he didn't put in a bid, he applied for a copy of the specifications and got them.

Then he proceeded to ascertain where he would get the material called for, and the price he would have to pay for it.

A week later he learned that the plant of a big contractor was about to be sold by the widow.

He called at the dead man's office and had a long talk with the manager.

He learned that the plant contained everything suitable for the prosecution of large enterprises like the breakwater.

Then he called on the widow and had a talk with her.

He made such a favorable impression on the lady that

she consented to sell him the plant at about half its value, for a payment of ten per cent. down and the balance in nine equal payments.

Bob closed with her, and then hired the office force of the establishment with a few exceptions, installing Will in place of the late general assistant.

He called his manager into consultation and they figured out a bid on the government job and sent it in with the necessary deposit.

A month later he was awarded the contract on showing that he had the money and facilities for putting it through.

The job was to be finished in eight months, or he would forfeit a certain sum per day for every day it was uncompleted after the stipulated time.

On the other hand, as the work was one of great importance, he would receive a bonus for every day he saved through delivery of the completed work before the eight months.

Bob determined to earn some of the bonus, and he did.

The job was completed three weeks before the eight months and the government engineer notified to that effect.

It was now his duty to make a final inspection with reference to its acceptance by the government.

He reported that the work was first-class in every respect, and that, in his opinion, the new breakwater was the finest in the country.

This fact was immediately reported through all the leading dailies, and Bob suddenly found himself famous as a contractor.

Flushed with his early success, Bob was seated in his office one morning when his father walked in upon him most unexpectedly.

Their greeting may be better imagined than described.

Mr. Brandon explained that he had been working way off in the wilds of Canada and only accidentally saw Bob's advertisement in an old newspaper which he came across.

He came on to Malden village at once, and was there directed to Boston.

He was surprised to find his son at the head of a big contracting plant, with a business that might now be considered worth a quarter of a million since his government success.

"Well, father, it is all due to that treasure I found on my thirty-acre farm at Malden. Only for that I never would have been able to have worked the breakwater contract, and that has been the making of me. I may say, with some truth, that it was that treasure which has boosted me into fame, and no name in my line of business stands higher with the government to-day than Bob Brandon, Contractor."

THE END.

Read "A BOY FROM THE SOUTH; OR, CLEANING OUT A WALL STREET CROWD," which will be the next number (216) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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Fame and Fortune Weekly

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 12, 1909.

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GOOD STORIES.

In the mountain regions of Cuba there are many ridges and valleys of extremely fertile land, nearly all untouched, and existing practically as they did before the time of the Spaniards.

The following is an excellent method of cooling water: Fill a gallon bottle and then wet a crash towel or any other cloth and wrap it around the bottle; set in a draught and in a few hours the water will be found to be cool. The hotter the day the cooler the water. This is the principle of the ice plant. As the moisture is evaporated from the towel the heat is drawn from the water, leaving it cool and pleasant. In Mexico and Cuba a porous earthen jar is used, and water soaks through, cooling the water within. In country towns butter and vegetables are kept in the cellar in wet cloths and remain cool and firm.

The brush-eating instinct of the Angora goat is being demonstrated on the Lassen National Forest in California, where they are cutting trails for fire guards through the brushy areas on the mountain slopes. The goats have been divided into two bands of 1,500 each, and under care of herders are grazed on areas to be cleared. They have killed nearly all the brush in the course either by eating it entirely or by barking, as in the case of manzanita bushes. Goats will just as readily attack manzanita as any other bushes where there is little else. The goats did not begin until about the middle of June, but have made rapid progress. The trails will be kept free of sprouts by the goats, saving the Government the labor of cutting them out by hand.

Judge Norman S. Buck, a member of the lower house of the Washington Legislature, died recently. Judge Buck was a pioneer resident of this district, and of the Cœur d'Alene mining district and was widely known and popular. In the late '80s Judge Buck rendered a decision while sitting on the bench in Idaho that attracted attention throughout the nation, as it decided the ownership of the Bunker Hill and Sullivan mine, the greatest silver-lead producer in the world, still said to be worth \$10,000,000, and having an annual output of over \$3,000,000. The mine was located by Phil O'Rourke and his partner during a prospecting tour in the winter of 1884-85 as a result of the uncovering of the outcropping through the pawing of a pack mule which they had found astray and appropriated. "Dutch Jake" Goetz and Harry Baer owned the mule, and Judge Buck decided that they were therefore entitled to a grubstake interest in the mine. They sold their

interest for \$300,000, which became the foundation for a much greater fortune accumulated in business.

One cannot say that a lost cat finds its way home by instinct. "Home" is a different place for each cat, and no series of mechanical acts will take the animal there. The lost animal finds its way home precisely as a lost man finds his. It depends on its sense of direction, its judgment of distance, its memory of familiar points. Most four-footed beasts and most men, once badly lost, stay lost and do not get home at all. When they do, in one case as in the other, it is largely perseverance and luck. Even the homing pigeon has to be put through a long training before it can find its way home. In fact, this whole problem of homing and migratory instincts illustrates nicely the modern way of interpreting animal behavior. There is no "homing instinct." The animal becomes wonted to some particular tree or hole or human fire-side. This means to him warmth and shelter and food. It is, in short, his home; and if he is a home body, he longs for it when absent, like any of the rest of us. So cat and horse and dog and carrier pigeon return to their abodes, not by virtue of any strange, peculiar instinct, but because they know the way.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Mrs. Ferguson—George, what do you have to do when you want to draw some money out of a bank?

Mr. Ferguson—You have to put some money in the bank beforehand. That's always been my experience.

"Yes," Gussie was saying, "it was the first time I had met him, and he actually called me a fool. Hadn't been talking to him five minutes, either. Say, what kind of a fellow is he, anyway?"

"Well," said Knox, quietly, "he's awfully slow, for one thing."

"But surely you believe that the sins of the father are visited on the children."

"I guess I do. My gov'nor promised to let me have a tinner this morning, but he lost at bridge last night and I didn't get it."

Official—How could the people get out of this theater in case of fire?

Lessee—They could step right out in every direction.

Official—There are no doors.

Lessee—No; but this old building couldn't burn more than five minutes before the walls would tumble out.

Warden—A dying burglar has confessed that he committed the murder for which you were sentenced, and as it was a clear case of mistaken identity, the governor has granted you a pardon.

Innocent Man—A pardon? What am I pardoned for?

Warden—For committing the murder, of course. Go; but don't do it again.

The reservation Indian was instructing his son in the higher branches of salesmanship as applied to the sassafras business.

"And now what's the clinching argument, dad, the last word that never fails to land 'em?" asked the bright young brave.

And Man-Foolish-Like-a-Fox—for that was father's real name—gravely replied: "Tell the tightwads that you're trying to work your way through Carlisle College!"

A Brave Boy's Search

By D. W. Stevens.

Tom Harden was an American boy, whose father had been a sea captain, but had been missing for many years.

That he was dead no one was sure, and to the finding out whether he was or not, Tom determined to devote his whole life.

At the age of seventeen Tom went to sea as an ordinary sailor on board the ship Triton, bound for the Mediterranean.

This was at a time when the Barbary pirates swept the inland sea and carried desolation to so many hearts.

One day the Triton, having left Gibraltar, and now laying her course for Naples, was attacked by a pirate vessel and taken, after a severe struggle.

The captain was killed during the fight, the first mate had leaped overboard to escape a like fate, and many of the sailors lay dead when the pirates at last took possession.

The survivors were cruelly butchered and their bodies cast into the sea, the ship being then plundered and set on fire.

Tom's life was spared, the captain of the pirate vessel, a fierce, swarthy-skinned Spaniard, having evidently taken a liking to him.

The boy had fought as desperately as any one, and with his sharp cutlass had given the quietus to more than one of the pirates.

It was therefore inexplicable that the pirate chief should spare him, when all the rest were killed, but such was his will, and no one offered or dared to dispute it.

Many of the men and some of the officers cast black looks upon him, and muttered harsh words beneath their breath, but the captain, noting this, cried impetuously, stamping his foot, and grinding his teeth:

"Enough of this! It is my will that the boy should live. He can serve me, and I wish him to do so. Dare to look black at him, any one of you, and I will kill the mutinous wretch with my own hand."

The burning wreck of the once gallant Triton was left behind, and the Vengeance—such was the name of the pirate—sailed away to the coast of Algiers.

Tom attended Captain Velasquez in the cabin and made himself generally useful, often reading to him of a night, or soothing him to sleep with the sweet tones of the lute, for the boy was a ready musician, and could play on any instrument, no matter how strange, almost at sight.

Tom could sing, and the pirate used often to ask him to do so, the songs he liked best being those which spoke of love and moonlight, and mossy dells and babbling brooks, as he had no taste whatever for those which described stirring events or told of the great ocean.

Tom's dress was now that of an Arab, and he carried a sword in his broad, red sash, wore a white turban, and with his bronzed face and in his picturesque attire looked for all the world like a true child of the Orient.

One day he said to the pirate, when the latter chanced to be in a better humor than usual:

"How was it, Captain Velasquez, that you spared me alone of all the crew of the Triton?"

"Because I fancied you—because I saw in you a resemblance to some one whom I once——"

"Loved?"

"No"—and the pirate's face darkened—"to one whom I hated—and I desired that you—— Leave me, boy; I am not

in a humor for conversation. Though, stop; remain and play to me, but say nothing."

"It was my father. You knew him, and saw a resemblance. You have but spared me that you may wreak a more complete vengeance——"

"Silence!"

"You would make a pirate of me, that you may add more shame to his name. Tell me, does he still live? Where——"

The pirate sprang to his feet in a rage, overturning the little stand on which rested a decanter of blood-red wine, spilling it over the floor like blood.

"Silence, I command you! Ha! what is that? Blood! Leave me, I say, or I will not answer——"

"Does he still live?"

With a face inflamed with passion the freebooter rushed at the lad, dagger in hand.

Tom hastily fled, not caring to risk his life further until he had learned what he so earnestly wished to know.

Shortly afterward he heard the sound of the little silver bell with which Velasquez was wont to summon him to his side.

Approaching the cabin cautiously, for he knew not if the man meant to entrap him, he pushed aside the hanging gently and peered into the apartment.

The pirate was seated upon a low velvet cushioned chair, his feet stretched out in front of him, his head thrown back, muttering to himself between the puffs of a fragrant cigarette:

"What memories that boy's face awaken! Did he know that hate for his father was all that inspired me to spare him, he might not thank me as he has hitherto done."

"I thought so," muttered the lad to himself.

"Did he know the wretched state of that man, how he lives on and on, only to suffer, how his tender heart would bleed, how his eyes would flush, what noble resolutions would arise!"

For a moment or so the man was silent, and then puffing a dense cloud of smoke into the air, he continued his musings:

"Neglected, abandoned, and utterly wretched, what miserable hours the man must spend. I will make his son a pirate, stain his hands with blood, and then let his father know all that I may enjoy his agony."

"Oh, the wretch!" thought Tom. "I must know."

Seeing a large mirror in front of the pirate, and fearful that the latter might see his reflection in it, the boy stepped behind the curtain so that he could still hear and yet not be seen.

"How I hated him," continued the man, "for the love which Dolores bestowed upon him. He would not return it, but for all that I hated him, and resolved to take vengeance upon him. Then, when the ship left Cadiz, I followed and destroyed all, sparing his life that I might—— And now this boy comes and——"

Here he suddenly started up and struck the little silver bell violently with his clinched fist.

Tom retreated, but presently returned, the bell having sounded once more; and sweeping aside the curtains, found the captain pacing up and down the room like a caged animal.

"Why do you dally? I have already struck the bell twice."

"I did not know as you would be pleased to see me, sir. You bade me leave you and——"

"There—there, boy, sit down and soothe me to sleep with the harp. Think no more of my harsh words. Your father is dead, lad, so let us hear no more about him. He died nobly defending his ship. I remember Captain Harden well, and to atone for his death I wish to be kind to you. Be seated, and say no more."

Then he stretched himself out upon a cushioned divan, lit a fresh cigarette, and as the sweet notes of the harp fell upon his ear closed his eyes, let his hand fall listlessly by his side, and seemed to be asleep.

Tom resolved to keep a discreet silence, but to watch and listen, trusting that the day would at last come when he would see his father and avenge his cruel treatment.

The day after the discovery the pirate vessel came in sight of the coast, and toward evening they dropped anchor in a little bay hidden among the rocks.

The pirate and his principal officers, together with half of the crew, including Tom, went on shore, and the boy spent the night in the rock-built castle of Captain Velasquez.

The next morning was spent in bringing ashore the treasures contained in the vessel, and Tom was kept busy attending on the pirate.

Rumors came during the morning that an American cruiser had been seen in the neighborhood, and Velasquez gave orders to have his vessel so transformed as to present the appearance of an honest trader, in case the cruiser should prove too inquisitive.

In the middle of the afternoon Tom managed to get away, and plunged into a wood adjacent to the pirate stronghold, where he began exploring upon his own account.

Bordering the wood was a collection of houses, in which the wives and families of the pirates lived, for there was quite a colony here, some of the men occasionally remaining ashore, while those who had not been to sea during the last trip took their places.

The day was warm, and Tom was glad to escape to the shade of the wood, little knowing what a surprise was in store for him.

Presently he started up a small animal, somewhat resembling a pig, and drawing his sword he pursued it, in sheer wantonness.

The animal fled, and soon, to Tom's great surprise, ran under the closed door of a wretched hovel, which he had not before observed.

It was half hidden by trees, in fact, and covered with creeping vines, having no windows and but one door, and Tom might have passed it a dozen times without seeing it, had not his notice been thus strangely attracted to it.

Rushing forward, he put his shoulders to the door, burst it open, finding himself in a small, foul-smelling room, where but a dim light prevailed.

A flood of light came in at the doorway, and Tom paused spellbound upon the threshold, though at first he could but dimly comprehend the sight before him.

Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the light, his other senses became awakened, and he advanced into the slovenly apartment, a vague feeling of disquietude possessing him.

The place was dark, the roof low and partly fallen in, the floor the damp earth, and the furniture being of the poorest and scantiest kind.

The place had an occupant, however, and it was this which cautious about entering.

io. 13. HO a rough three-legged stool, his hand resting upon a rickety table, on which stood a water jug, was a man clothed in rags and nearly nude, his head between his hands, and his long, unkempt hair and beard falling nearly to his knees.

"No hope—no hope!" muttered the man, in Tom's own language. "Day after day, year after year passes by, and there is no escape!"

"My God!" murmured Tom; "can it be that——"

"A prisoner in this horrible place, watched continually by the pirates, set to do the hardest tasks, given the coarsest

and scantiest food—why do I live on and on without hope—without one ray of comfort?"

"Heaven help me," thought Tom; "is this poor man——"

"Why do I not die? Why don't these brutes kill me, or let me take my own life, since all is lost to me? Home, friends, relatives, all are lost to me now, and my boy—my poor Tom——"

"Father!" cried the boy, bounding forward, "I have come to save you. It is Tom—your own son!"

This poor wretch, fretting his heart away, longing for home or death to come and relieve him, could be no other than the boy's missing father.

He knew it, he was sure of it. The pirate had said that he was still alive, and living the most horrible existence—it could be none else than the man himself.

Tom sprang forward, and throwing himself at the man's feet, seized his hands, and cried passionately:

"Father!—Captain Harden—do you not know me? It is Tom—your own Tom—come to restore you to life. Look at me—speak to me, or I shall go mad!"

For a few moments the man gazed at the boy kneeling before him in a dazed sort of manner, and then the tears began to flow slowly down his cheeks, and his eyes assumed a more gentle look.

"It is a dream," he murmured. "I have often seen my Tom thus, but then the vision has passed from me and left me desolate."

"No, no; it is reality!" cried the boy, rising and putting his arms about the man's neck. "It is your own Tom, and I have come to release you from the power of Captain Velasquez. I know all, but you shall suffer no longer."

"Velasquez! He is a demon! Oh, if I could but meet him I would tear his eyes out with my bony fingers! He never comes to me but to taunt me and impose harder tasks. Oh, that I could kill him!"

Tom hastily led his father out into the warm air, and at that moment the two came face to face with Velasquez himself, armed with a gleaming sword.

"Ha, you have found him!" he hissed. "It will do neither of you good, for I will kill him and drag you off to be a pirate. The ship is ready to sail at this moment."

"Stand back!" cried Tom, drawing his sword.

The pirate rushed upon the brave boy, and the latter, throwing himself in front of his father, parried the blow aimed at his own breast, and then attacked the pirate most impetuously.

Expert swordsman as he was, he could not stand up against that terrible onslaught, and he presently began to retreat.

Tom thought of all his father had suffered, of the many crimes committed by Velasquez, and nerving himself for the final struggle, rushed forward, broke down the pirate's guard, and plunged his sword to the hilt in the miscreant's body.

The wretch fell dead without a groan, and Tom, seizing his father's hand, hurried toward the shore, where, to his great joy, he saw the American cruiser just entering the bay.

In a few minutes he and his father, so strangely restored, were on board the cruiser, whose crew had landed and begun a vigorous attack upon the pirates.

Their vessel was destroyed, their village burned, the castle leveled to the ground, and not one of the men spared, only the women and children being allowed to escape.

Tom and his father returned to America, where the captain died shortly after, his health and spirits being broken down, and although his fondest hope had been at last realized, he did not long survive the happy result of A BRAVE BOY'S SEARCH.

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